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Volume 2

Volume 2

***On the Genesis of Augustine's Political Ideas
in his Formative Intellectual Experiences***

Τί ἐστιν ἀληθεια ;

Κατα Ιωαννην 18: 38

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20 MAY 2009



Chapter 8

AUGUSTINE'S EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

From his Birth to His Nineteenth Year

This short chapter must do the work of giving the facts of Augustine's life up until his nineteenth year – the year that it is customary to celebrate as his conversion to philosophy. Such intellectual landmarks are never immune to qualification and tend inevitably to grow in retrospect; but there seems little reason to doubt the significance of this one. For from his nineteenth year, Augustine underwent a profound change in outlook and intellectual equipment. Prompted by his reading of Cicero's *Hortensius*, he began to become increasingly attuned to a deep disquiet in his heart, and to refer more and more of his hopes and achievements to stilling it; though it is important to emphasise that this was a purely intellectual event, common enough to men of Augustine's sensibility and circumstances: the kind of event that very seldom issues in much more than a change of mind, and whose public expression is the preference for a new type of literature. It is only in exceptional cases that conversions to philosophy have their effects beyond the library, and then strictly speaking they become something else.

This new concern and priority marks the proper beginning of Augustine's years of intellectual struggle. Before, he was largely taken up with the standard preoccupations of a man of his brilliance and prospects, but afterwards, he would come to live like a

haunted man, unable to shake off a troubling sense of inadequacy in his life and its arrangements. And it is in these years of struggle, captured so clearly in the *Confessiones*, that one first begins to get a sense for the unique composition of Augustine's genius,¹ and perhaps more importantly, to appreciate how much it has gone on to influence his thought and writing.

(a) On the character of Augustine's genius

Unlike so many other great men before and after him, Augustine's is not the genius of some one virtue singled out and ridden to death; it is instead the genius of a number of virtues and traits arranged so as to complement each other, and by their arrangement fitted perfectly to their purpose. It is a genius that many of Augustine's commentators have struggled to do justice to. For the simple fact is that genius of Augustine's type does not very easily reduce to its basic elements; indeed, the closer and harder that it is looked at the more elusive it tends to become until all that is left is a mess of contrasts. And of these contrasts the two most outstanding – the two that might be said to represent all the rest – are 'faith' and 'reason'. Some thinkers have been all heart and others have been all mind but evidently Augustine was able to join both in a complex and effective reconciliation. Eugène Portalié is one of the most sincere and learned exponents of this view:

Great intellectuality admirably fused with an enlightened mysticism is Augustine's distinguishing characteristic. Truth is not for him only an object of contemplation; it is a good that must be possessed, that must be loved and lived by. What

¹ The term 'genius' is being used here in its Latin sense, as the tutelar spirit or essence of a person. See the article 'genius' in *LD*, p. 808b.

constitutes Augustine's genius is his marvelous gift of embracing truth with all the fibres of his soul; not with the heart alone, for the heart does not think; not with the mind alone, for the mind grasps only the abstract or, as it were, lifeless truth. Augustine seeks the living truth, and even when he is combating certain Platonic ideas he is of the family of Plato, not of Aristotle. He belongs indisputably to all ages because he is in touch with all souls, but he is preeminently modern because his doctrine is not the cold light of the School; he is living and penetrated with personal sentiment. Religion is not a simple theory, Christianity is not a series of dogmas; it is also a life, as they say nowadays, or, more accurately, a source of life. However, let us not be deceived. Augustine is not a sentimentalist, a pure mystic, and heart alone does not account for his power. If in him the hard, cold intellectuality of the metaphysicians gives place to an impassioned vision of truth, that truth is the basis of it all. He never knew the vaporous mysticism of our day, that allows itself to be lulled by a vague, aimless sentimentalism. His emotion is deep, true, engrossing, precisely because it is born of a strong, secure, accurate dogmatism that wishes to know what it loves and why it loves. Christianity is life, but life in the eternal, unchangeable truth. And if none of the Fathers has put so much of his heart into his writings, neither has any turned upon truth the searchlight of a stronger, clearer intellect.²

² *CE*, p. 94. The Reverend D. Trapp, OESA, employs the metaphor of 'magnetic declination' to good effect: '...his thought is closer to God than to creature, closer to soul than to body, closer to practice than to theory, closer to faith than to reason, closer to charity than to speculation. (*CDT*, p. 221). A more cautious analysis is E. de Pressensé: '...he had the greatness and also the want of moderation which we discover in all strong and impassioned natures. He could do neither good nor evil by halves. From a dissolute youth he recoiled into extreme asceticism, and from metaphysical freedom into the most stringent system of authority. He was the staunchest champion of orthodoxy; nor did he sufficiently respect the claims of conscience. He sacrificed the moral element to God's sovereignty, which he maintained most unflinchingly.' (*DCB*, p. 222).

Now of course it would be foolish to overstate the degree to which this genius can be accounted for out of the circumstances and events of Augustine's upbringing and education, and besides, by the terms of this dissertation, the decisive event of his life was the beginning of his commitment to becoming a new creation and the casting off of the old. In other words, the first thirty-two years of his old life were significant only for being given up. However, by the same token, the value and importance of the new life can only really be appreciated when set in relief against the trajectory of the old. By the time of his baptism, in 387, Augustine had accomplished a great deal: he was a public intellectual in the Late Roman Empire, a man who could count Emperors and courtiers amongst his friends and admirers, and surely in line for high political office. By the standards and logic of the world he was, then, an outstanding success; the son of a modest provincial made good; and standing in the baptistry at Milan it could not have escaped him how much he, and indeed all those who had invested in his success, would stand to lose by it. These important facts and others combine to give a sense of the magnitude of his achievement in giving up his worldly ambitions for a Christian life of service to God. And in addition to this, they do go some way towards helping to account for the singular character of his genius. In this chapter, the concern will only be with the first nineteen years of his old life.

(b) The material and cultural circumstances of Augustine's birth

In what way could the material and cultural circumstances of Augustine's birth be said to have contributed to his subsequent outlook? His father, Patricius, was a respectable free-born citizen of Thagaste (the present day Souk Ahras, in Algeria) in Proconsular Africa.

He was of the Decurion class,³ and so expected to be involved in the administration of the town's affairs.⁴ However, in Roman North Africa of the mid fourth-century A.D., the kudos of this position had come to be outweighed by very real disadvantages. Africa at that time was being crushed under the weight of unbearable taxes imposed from Rome,⁵ and Patricius and others with him on the Municipal Council would have been charged with paying and raising them.⁶ There is evidence that these men were prepared to go to some lengths to avoid being implicated in what was clearly a difficult and thankless task.⁷ Augustine indicates that Patricius was certainly not one to shirk his duties; to the contrary, he was proud of his birth and set great store by his rank and privileges; but he must have found it increasingly difficult to be part of a class effectively under siege from above and below: that is, forced by the powers that be to extract inflationary taxes from an impoverished and resentful peasantry.⁸ When talking in this general way about class in late antique Roman society, it is important to remember that its quantity as a category

³ *Vita*, I, 1: '...numbered amongst the *curiales*...' The operative word here, *curiales*, is best looked upon as the genus of which *decurio* is a species. See the article 'Curia' in DGRA, p. 377a.

⁴ Anthony Rich's definition of a *decurio* is, 'A senator in any of the municipal towns or colonies, who held a corresponding rank, and discharged similar functions in his town to what the senators did at Rome.' He cites as an ancient authority on the matter, Cicero, *Oratio pro Sestio*, IV, 10. (DGRA, p. 234).

⁵ The most unbearable was called the *annona*: a tax paid in kind, normally in the form of corn or some other such staple, and traditionally associated with the public benefaction of the Emperor. Major cities all over the empire received the *annona*. See Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*, p. 27, for a description of the astonishing scale of this work of traditional civic charity.

⁶ This was in accordance with standard Roman procedure: those that paid the taxes were invariably required to administer them too. In practice, this gave them considerable freedom to put the costs onto those beneath them. See W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in North Africa* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 63 for more on this.

⁷ The *Codex Theodosianus* contains a number of decrees concerned with African *Decuriones* attempting to escape their duties.

⁸ Augustine described him as an, '...inconsiderable burgher of Thagaste.' (*Confess.*, II, 3, 5). And elsewhere he described himself as: '...a poor man, born of poor parents.' (*Serm.*, CCCLVI, 13). As Brown points out in his *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*, 'Impoverishment was what most ancient persons feared most for themselves. And with good reason. Impoverishment could come at any time, from any number of misfortunes...' Patricius' position as a member of the middle-class would have been no guarantee of financial security for his family: for as Brown makes clear, '[Late Antique society] was a world of persons who considered themselves, and often with good reason, to be vulnerable to impoverishment.' (p. 15).

was not merely wealth. For in the ancient world, all identities were municipal in their first instance: that is, all rights and obligations referred to a man's status as a citizen of his city. In practice, this came to mean that the public responsibilities of certain classes of citizen were often badly out of alignment with the economic reality of their situation. In the provinces of the later Roman empire, none more so than the hapless middle-class: men like Patricius: just too high born to avoid the burden of local government; far too poor properly to be able to afford it. In one of his letters Augustine mentions that his inherited share of the family property was equal to approximately one-twentieth of the land that he held in trust as Bishop of Hippo.⁹ In today's terms, this would be a sizeable estate; but clearly the truer picture of his family's economic situation emerges from the fact that Patricius was not alone able to raise the monies to send him to university at Carthage. In the end it was only with the financial help of a rich patron, Romanianus (quite possibly a family relation), that he managed it. However, short of referring Patricius to some sort of crude class stereotype, there is not much more that one can say for the man, for he is probably the most notorious victim of what Peter Brown has called Augustine's 'significant silences'.¹⁰

Indeed Patricius' rôle in the *Confessiones* is largely symbolic and sketched without the warmth and romance normally associated with these things. Augustine seems determined to allow him to stand as the archetypal citizen of the earthly city: a father wholly unconcerned with his son's spiritual development but intoxicated by his prospects

⁹ See *Ep.*, CXXVI, 7. He later endowed it to the Church of Thagaste on being elected bishop.

¹⁰ Brown, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, p. 30.

of worldly success.¹¹ In fact almost all of Augustine's remarks on his father seem influenced by a desire to point a moral at the expense of the earthly city. However by reading through this rhetoric, it is possible to arrive at a picture of Patricius which though limited, is probably not far from the truth. He was evidently a man comfortably described by the civic identity of his class: an old fashioned Roman, grave in his responsibilities and settled in his outlook. He was a man who, one suspects, was liable to be made fun of by Augustine and his friends. And it is perhaps for this reason that the historian feels compelled to say something on his behalf, for it seems clear that he suffered the fate of most average fathers who have brilliant sons. By the limitations of his outlook he was unable to take anything more than a superficial interest in Augustine's achievements and consequently, succeeded only in frustrating him with his bourgeois ambitions.¹² It is probably also significant in this respect how great a weight Augustine would come to attach to Ambrose, his spiritual father.

Yet measured by the standards of his day, Patricius' faults were hardly high in the catalogue of sins: Augustine mentions that he was unfaithful to Monica's bed on a handful of occasions¹³ and otherwise, liable to be an overzealous disciplinarian.¹⁴ This was unexceptional behaviour for a man of his type; even if it does seem to have been just this unexceptional aspect to Patricius which Augustine so resented, and which drove him to present him entirely in terms of it in his *Confessiones*. However, as it is customary

¹¹ At *Confess.*, II, 3, 6, Augustine describes it as, '...that intoxication, wherein this world, from the unseen wine of its own perverse will, tending down towards lower things, forgets You, its Creator, and loves Your creatures more than Yourself.'

¹² It is Dyson who uses the term 'bourgeois' to describe the limitations of Patricius' outlook. It is reproduced here in acknowledgement of the fact that it is very well chosen. (Dyson, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, p. 1).

¹³ See *Confess.*, IX, 9, 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

to point out, he was at the same time careful to moderate this image of Patricius with small but significant testaments to his unusual generosity as a father¹⁵ and respectfulness as a husband.¹⁶

Scholars mostly agree that Augustine and his family were of indigenous African stock (Berber);¹⁷ though very much Latinized¹⁸ and evidently speaking only Latin at home as a matter of some pride and dignity.¹⁹ John K. Ryan speculates that if they had shared the typical features of their race (called *Afri* by the Romans), they would have been, '...fair-skinned, with brown or yellow hair, and blue eyes.'²⁰ In his writings, Augustine seems to give some account to his African heritage; at least he is happy to call himself an African. Trapè observes how he refers to Apuleius as, 'the most notorious of us Africans' (*Ep.*, CXXXVIII, 19); to Ponticianus, as 'a countryman of ours, insofar as being African' (*Confess.*, VIII, 6, 14); to Maximinian of Madaura as, 'an African man writing of Africa, or at any rate, with that flat nose that you see in Africans...' (*Ep.*, XVII, 2); and to Faustus of Milevis as, 'an African Gentleman' (*Contra Faustum*, I, 1).

¹⁵ See *Confess.*, II, 3, 5.

¹⁶ See *ibid.*, IX, 9, 19.

¹⁷ For instance, H. I. Marrou's educated guess that, 'By a calculation of probabilities we are permitted to infer that Augustine was, without doubt, of pure Berber stock.' (H. I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et l'augustinisme* (Paris, Seuil, 1956), p. 11).

¹⁸ In Bonner's opinion, 'It seems likely indeed that Augustine came of Berber stock, though his culture and outlook were thoroughly Roman.' (Gerald Bonner, *St. Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies* (London, SCM Press, 1963), p. 21). Trapè concurs: 'Although born in Africa, and as everyone is made to think, of African stock, Augustine was Roman by culture and language.' (Trapè, *Agostino: l'uomo, il pastore, il mistico*, p. 17). Trapè is here drawing attention to the desire of some scholars to impose a modern conception of African ethnicity on Augustine. There is, however, evidence to show that neither he nor his immediate people were black: 'Ethiopians are black', explains Augustine to his congregation, without anything to suggest that he or they were a similar colour. (*En. in ps.*, 73, 16). For Brown's thoughts see below, n. 23, p. 182. Cf. Vernon J. Bourke's comments in his review article, 'Perler's Contribution to Augustine Biography', *AS*, Vol. II (1971), pp. 224-227.

¹⁹ See *Confess.*, I, 14, 23.

²⁰ John K. Ryan, 'Introduction', in his translation of *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (New York, Doubleday, 1960), p. 18.

Moreover, he clearly picks Cyprian out as the African in a line-up of bishops: 'Cyprian the African, Ilarius the Gaul, Ambrose the Italian, Gregory the Greek' (*Op. imp. c. Iul.*, II, 33). What is more, when Julian scathingly calls him *Punic* in a heated exchange, Augustine does not refute it, but brings to mind instead the *Punic* Cyprian, and accuses his opponent of making an *argumentum ad hominem*, that is, of attempting to win his argument on race (Julian was an Italian of Puglia) not reason (*Op. imp. c. Iul.*, I, 7; 6, 18).²¹ Evidently when he went to Milan as Professor of Rhetoric, his African accent was thought by some to be an embarrassing accoutrement. However he was far too concerned with the substance of what he was saying to be seriously bothered by it.²²

Of far greater moment is the fact that he grew up as a Latin in Africa: that is, as part of the vanguard of a declining civilization; though perhaps Patricius would have felt this more acutely than his brilliant son, who must always have had hopes of succeeding in one of the great centres of the Empire. It is Augustine's Latinity, his real pride in the history and achievements of his culture that emerges as the decisive influence on his character, thought and work. As so often happens when the seeds of a great civilization are planted on foreign shores, the new growth is a vigorous conservatism protected by a prickly pride. The mother civilization develops, but her provincial children, cut-off from the changes at home, continue their original trajectory, are comforted and even fortified by it. For after all it is their heritage and identity in a strange new land, and until that land changes them by gradual adjustments and accretions, into something new altogether, they hold on to it with a myopic tenacity until it begins to appear increasingly alien to those at

²¹ Trapè, *Agostino: l'uomo, il pastore, il mistico*, p. 17.

²² See *De ord.*, II, 17, 45: 'Nevertheless, the Italians still mock my pronunciation of many words, and in exchange they are always reprimanded by me over questions of pronunciation.'

home. Brown's is probably the truest portrait of these African men; at any rate, it is certainly the most well-known:

For men like Patricius and Romanianus did not think of themselves as Romans for nothing. It is most unlikely that Augustine spoke anything but Latin. Between the exclusively Latin culture into which he had been so successfully educated, and any pre-existing 'native' tradition, there stretched the immeasurable qualitative chasm, separating civilization from its absence. What was not Roman in Africa, could only be thought of by such a man, in Roman terms. Augustine will use the term 'Punic' to describe the native dialects which most countrymen would have spoken exclusively, and which many townsmen shared with Latin. This was not because such men spoke the language of the ancient Carthaginians. Rather Augustine, an educated man, would instinctively apply this, the traditional, undifferentiated term, to any language spoken in North Africa that did not happen to be Latin.²³

²³ Brown, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, p. 22. As Brown goes on to observe in a note, it is very difficult to ascertain the extent to which Augustine was touched by a residual ethnicity. His cautious approach to the matter is recommended here as an antidote to the modern academic fashion of privileging ethnicity out of proportion to its causal rôle in history. No doubt a black Punic speaking Augustine would suit many modern agendas; but the plain fact is that by the strict codes of his profession, the intellectual historian is not permitted to serve any other agenda than the truth. As such, after a careful study of the linguistic evidence for ethnicity in the developing Christian culture of Roman North Africa, Brown concludes that, '...there was only one "language of culture" in Late Roman Africa – that was Latin; that the particular form of the Christianity in the Later Empire, Catholic and Donatist alike, demanded a "language of culture"; and, so, that the rapid Christianization of Numidia involved, not a resurgence of any regional culture, but the creation of a Latin – or sub-Latin – religious culture on an unprecedented scale.' (Peter Brown, *Religion and Society in the Age of St. Augustine* (London, Faber & Faber, 1972), pp. 287-288). It is tempting to see a helpful parallel here to the situation in the Western empire, where the barbarians actively sought to acquire Latin Christian culture in recognition of the fact that it was far superior to their own. Perhaps this is simply the way of the world: in the patronizing imagination of the modern, it is often forgotten that those who live the simple, 'ethnic' life do so out of necessity rather than preference, and that like anyone, they too dream of better things. As helps to further investigation of this matter, Brown suggests W. H. C. Frend, 'A Note on the Berber Background in the Life of Saint Augustine', *JTS*, xliii, 1942, pp. 188-191; Chr. Courtois, 'S. Augustin et la survivance de la punique', *RAf*, 94, 1950, pp. 239-282; M. Simon, 'Punique ou berbère?', *Annuaire de l'Inst. de Philol. et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves*, xiii, 1955, pp. 613-629 (= *Recherches d'Histoire Judéo-Chrétienne*, 1962, pp. 88-100); and G. Charles-Picard, *La civilisation de l'Afrique romaine* (Paris, Librairie Plon, 1959), pp. 393-395. To this could be added F. Vattioni, 'S. Agostino e la civiltà punica', *Aug*, 8 (1968), pp. 434-467.

And all of this self-consciousness could only have been heightened by the clear evidence of material decay that Augustine would have seen all around him. The buildings and monuments of Roman North Africa, once so splendid, were falling into disrepair and neglect. Years later, Augustine would be able to draw on this fact in a sermon: 'However, we do admit that some things are happening more frequently; that through lack of materials and a deteriorating state of affairs, those buildings that were previously constructed with great magnificence are now falling and collapsing into ruins.'²⁴

(c) Augustine's mother, Monica

Augustine gives a great deal of information about his mother, Monica (or Monnica, as her name is often spelt in the manuscripts). Catholics today are apt to regard her as one of the outstanding examples of Christian womanhood, such was her reputation for faith, courage, charity and love. E. -H. Vollet observes that, 'After the name of Mary, hers is the name that Catholic woman invoke with most emotion.'²⁵ Agostino Trapè calls her, '...an exceptional woman. Given by nature a brilliant intelligence, a strong character, and a profound sensibility.'²⁶

It seems to have been Monica's sincerest wish to establish a Christian household and educate her children and husband in the faith. Upon marriage, she immediately took this up as her task in life and worked at it assiduously against the instincts of her pagan husband. Her life's reward, and the greatest testament to her determination and forbearance in this matter, would be three children firm in the faith and a husband

²⁴ *Serm.*, XXIIIB, 13.

²⁵ *GE*, p. 663b.

²⁶ Trapè, *Agostino: l'uomo, il pastore, il mistico*, p. 29.

baptized on his deathbed. The children were Augustine (almost certainly the eldest), his brother Navigius (whom some scholars have as the eldest) and a sister who remains unnamed (though one tradition names her as Perpetua).²⁷

With Monica there is always the temptation to read into her unquestioning and relentless faith a kind of rustic simplicity of mind. This is not at all helped by her subservient attitude to her husband,²⁸ and more generally, what might be called her acquiescence in the settled order of things.²⁹ Yet it remains the case that everyone who met her was deeply struck; and many of her champions were in high places too. There was Augustine, of course, and Ambrose,³⁰ and then all the brilliant circle of Cassiciacum.³¹ All of these and others held her in the highest esteem as a Christian wife and mother.³² But her lasting monument – the monument that her son wanted to give her in his *Confessiones* – will be the triumph of her innocent and honest mind. Some short time before her death, on the inner terrace of a house at Ostia, she successfully joined her son in an advanced speculation on the Divine Wisdom. In this she would anticipate in her

²⁷ Navigius is mentioned in the *Confessiones* as being present at Monica's death (*Confess.*, IX, 11, 27). He traveled to Cassiciacum with Augustine and took his part in a number of the dialogues there: *Contra Acad.*, I, 2, 5-14; *De b. vita*, I, 6-7 & 2, 14; and *De ord.*, I, 2, 5. Possidius mentions him having two daughters who were both consecrated (*Vita*, 26, 1). Augustine mentions his sister in a letter. Evidently she became the abbess of a community of women at Hippo (*Ep.*, CCXI, 4); and Possidius explains how this came about (*Vita*, 26, 1).

²⁸ See the evidence of this at *Confess.*, IX, 9, 19.

²⁹ Augustine is surely drawing on his mother's example while making this recommendation to his congregation: 'And any good wife calls her husband her lord and master; in fact she doesn't only call him so, she really thinks so, she means it, she accepts it in her heart, she professes it with her lips, she regards her nuptial contract as the deed of her purchase.' (*Serm.*, XXXVII, 7).

³⁰ See *Confess.*, VI, 2, 2.

³¹ Augustine must be allowed to speak for them all, but the reader can be sure that his simple statement of fact, beautiful in its symmetry, is the obverse of a depth and a weight of feeling which outreached even his own powers of expression: '...she took care as though she had been mother to us all, and she served us as though she had been a daughter to all of us.' (*Confess.*, IX, 9, 22).

³² See *Confess.*, IX, 9, 22: 'Whosoever among them knew her greatly praised You, and honoured You, and loved You in her, because they recognised Your presence in her heart.'

own person the mature fruit of her son's future teaching: that it is granted to all men to know the wide open spaces if only they will give up the tiny pageants of their minds.³³ that the great feast has been spread out before them, but in their pride they do not see that it is there, and do not taste and eat and understand.³⁴ Augustine was to teach that men are born apart from God, so that each step they take is a step further away from Him.³⁵ The gift of Grace is to take a man back over all the steps of his life, back to his mother's womb; and there to birth him again³⁶ with a new heart so that each subsequent step can be walked with God, in the gradual and painful and uncertain³⁷ unfolding of salvation history.³⁸ This appalling idea could fairly be taken as the *genius loci* of Augustine's mature theology:

"That I may know what is wanting to me." For while I am struggling here, "this" is wanting unto me: and so long as it is wanting unto me, I do not call myself perfect. So long as I have not received it, I say, "not that I have already attained, either am already perfect; but I am pressing towards the prize of God's high calling." This let me receive as the prize of my running the race! There will be a certain resting-place, to terminate my course; and in that resting-place there will be a Country, and no pilgrimage, no dissension, no temptation. Make me then to know "this number of my days, which is, that I may know what is wanting unto

³³ *En. in ps.*, IV, 2: "In tribulation Thou hast enlarged me." Thou hast led me from the straits of sadness into the broad ways of joy.' Cf. *En. in ps.*, XXXI, 9: "Thou hast set my feet in a large room." The resurrection of my Lord being known, and mine own being promised me, my love, having been bought out of the straits of fear, walks abroad in continuance, into the expanse of liberty.'

³⁴ See *Confess.*, VII, 18, 24: 'He called to me, and said, "I am the way of truth, and the life." He mingled that food, which I was unable to receive, with our flesh, for "the Word was made flesh," so that Your Wisdom, by which You created all things, might provide milk for our infant condition.'

³⁵ For instance, in his *Confessiones* he unflinchingly asserts that, '...it is not the infant's will that is harmless, but the weakness of infant limbs. I myself have seen and have had experience with a jealous little one; it was not yet able to speak, but it was pale and bitter in face as it looked at another child nursing at the same breast.' (*Confess.*, I, 7, 11).

³⁶ See *En. in ps.*, IV, 8.

³⁷ See *ibid.*, XLII, 11.

³⁸ See *ibid.*, XL, 20.

me;” because I am not there yet; lest I should be made proud of what I already am, that “I may be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness.”... For though, in hope and in faith, made new already, how much do we even now do after our old nature! For we are not so completely “clothed upon” with Christ, as not to bear about with us anything derived from Adam. Observe that Adam is “waxing old” within us, and Christ is being “renewed” in us. “Though our outward man is perishing, yet is our inward man being renewed day by day.” Therefore, while we fix our thoughts on sin, on mortality, on time, that is hastening by, on sorrow, and toil, and labour, on stages of life following each other in succession, and continuing not, passing on insensibly from infancy even to old age; whilst, I say, we fix our eyes on these things, let us see here “the old man,” the “day that is waxing old;” the Song that is out of date; the Old Testament; when however we turn to the inner man, to those things that are to be renewed in place of these which are to be changed, let us find the “new man,” the “new day,” the “new song,” the “New Testament;” and that “newness,” let us so love, as to have no fears of its “waxing old.”³⁹

(d) Augustine's education up to his nineteenth year

Augustine's leaves enough evidence in his *Confessiones* to show that he underwent the typical early education of a Roman boy.⁴⁰ It was different from an equivalent modern education in the way that it was perfectly matched to the conditions of public success in the ancient world. As Rome's most celebrated teacher, Quintilian, described it:

³⁹ *En. in ps.*, XXXIX, 8-9. Cf. *En. in ps.*, XXV, 11.

⁴⁰ See Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, pp. 36-38, for a short account of Augustine's early education. For a more general survey of the essentials of the Roman education, see Laurie, *Historical Survey of Pre-Christian Education*, pp. 301-411.

If we constantly have occasion to speak of justice, fortitude, temperance, and other similar topics, so that a cause can scarcely be found in which some such discussion does not occur, and if all such subjects are to be illustrated by invention and elocution, can it be doubted that, wherever power of intellect and copiousness of language are required, the art of the orator is to be there pre-eminently exerted?⁴¹

This, it is to be remembered, was an intellectually conservative age: wisdom was conceived to be a finite quantity – won and preserved for all time in the great writings of antiquity and assumed to be of infinite future applicability. The task of the Roman educator was correspondingly to empty this store of wisdom into the mind of the Roman boy whilst also teaching him to articulate it eloquently and reverently. As Brown describes it, ‘...the aim was to measure up to the timeless perfection of an ancient classic.’⁴² It was an education that few could take to easily, and that probably fewer still could properly appreciate until coming of age. Not surprisingly, then, it was also an education that relied heavily on the expedient of the rod – actually a small eel skin flay called the *anguilla*. Augustine has his own description of this hardship:

Hence I was sent to school to acquire learning, the utility of which, wretched child that I was, I did not know. Yet if I was slow at learning, I was beaten. This method was praised by our forbears, many of whom had passed through this life before us and had laid out the hard path that we were forced to follow. Thus were both toil and sorrow multiplied for the sons of Adam... A little one, but with no little feeling, I prayed to You that I would not be beaten at school... we sinned by

⁴¹ Quintilian (tr. The Rev'd John Selby Watson), *Institutio Oratoria*, (New York, The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1965), Preface, 12. See also Laurie's comment that, ‘...in all things – even in the study of Greek – there was a Roman practical aim, while in all subjects, save literature and what bore directly on the full understanding of the poets, the Roman was superficial and utilitarian. Might we not say, superficial *because* utilitarian?’ (Laurie, *Historical Survey of Pre-Christian Education*, p. 340.

⁴² Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 37.

writing, reading, and thinking over our lessons less than was required of us. Lord, there was in us no lack of memory or intelligence, for You willed that we should have them in sufficient measure for our years. Yet we loved to play, and this was punished in us by men who did the same things themselves. However, the trivial concerns of adults are called business, while such things in children are punished by adults.⁴³

Here, incidentally, is an example of a rhetorical device used on a number of occasions by Augustine to show up and disparage the logic of the earthly city. In this dissertation, three instances of it have now been cited. The first occurred in Chapter One and concerned the famous story about Alexander and the petulant pirate;⁴⁴ the second occurred just a little earlier in this chapter and concerned Patricius' propensity to praise and admire only the worldly potential in his son's intellectual achievements.⁴⁵ This irony is a constant theme of Augustine's mature thinking on temporal affairs; however, as will be shown below, there is reason to think that it also caused him considerable anxiety as a thoughtful boy on the cusp of manhood.

From the beatings of his first school at Thagaste, Augustine would graduate to the less painful and more sophisticated environment of the university-town of Madauros. He was then about eleven years old⁴⁶ and beginning to show himself to be an outstanding prospect. He was also beginning to grow into the wisdom of what he was doing: this, in retrospect, would be a precious time of untroubled boyish learning. For after just five

⁴³ *Confess.*, I, 9, 14-15.

⁴⁴ See above, n. 24, p. 46.

⁴⁵ See above, pp. 175-177.

⁴⁶ The standard practice was for Roman boys to graduate from the primary *ludus publicus* to the secondary school of the *grammaticus* when they were eleven or twelve.

years his charmed world would fall apart: Patricius had run out of the funds to continue his education: he must return immediately to Thagaste and there await the time when enough money could be found to send him to the University of Carthage. This was evidently a complicated year for Augustine – a year in which he desperately needed a father of a similar sensibility to his to take a firm line with him. What actually happened was a disaster. Both parents, now very much in awe of their brilliant son and investing heavily in a glorious future for him, neglected to focus on the more mundane but urgent aspects of his life: ‘These were not those hopes of the life to come which my mother herself had, but those hopes for learning, which, as I knew, both parents desired too much: he, because he almost never thought of You, and only of vain things for me; she, because she thought that the usual studies would be not only no obstacle but even of some help to me in attaining You.’⁴⁷ It was a perilous situation: Augustine, now clearly the intellectual superior of his parents, was correspondingly given a moral license out of all proportion to his emotional maturity (which, as Brown is probably right in thinking, had been kept down by the intensity of his early education⁴⁸): ‘Meanwhile, the lines of liberty at play were loosened over me beyond any just severity and the result was dissolution and various punishments.’⁴⁹ Here is another instance of the cruel irony of the earthly city: ‘During the idleness of that sixteenth-year... the briars of unclean desires spread thick over my head, and there was no hand to root them out. Moreover, when my father saw me at the baths, he noted how I was growing into manhood and was clothed with stirring youth. From this, as it were, he already took pride in his grandchildren, and

⁴⁷ *Confess.*, II, 3, 8.

⁴⁸ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 38.

⁴⁹ *Confess.*, II, 3, 8.

found joy in telling it to my mother.'⁵⁰ Finally, in 371 A.D., the money for Carthage was found with the help of Romanianus.

Every scholar knows Augustine's description of his arrival in Carthage: 'I came to Carthage , where a cauldron of shameful loves seethed and sounded about me on every side.'⁵¹ But it would be unwise to read too much into this statement insofar as it echoes the feelings of nearly every male undergraduate who has ever gone up to university. It actually turns out that Augustine was better behaved than most: within a year he had entered a perfectly respectable relationship with his mistress, whom he would dearly and faithfully love until he was forced to give her up some fifteen years later.⁵² But then on reflection it does seem that Augustine had always been a bit of a swot – liable to exaggerate his misdeeds in order to stay in with what he saw as the fashionable crowd.⁵³

It is at Carthage that the interesting question of Augustine's residual Christianity arises. It has been explained how he grew up in a Christian home maintained by a pious and devout mother, imbibing the sort of unquestioning faith that children are renowned for. Augustine says that he used to pray not to be beaten at school, something for which

⁵⁰ *Confess.*, II, 3, 6.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, III, 1, 1.

⁵² See *Confess.*, IV, 2, 2: 'In those years I had a woman companion, not one joined to me in wedlock, but one whom my wandering passion, empty of prudence, had picked up. But I had this one only, and moreover I was faithful to her bed.'

⁵³ See *ibid.*, II, 3, 7: '...I ran headlong with such great blindness that I was ashamed to be remiss in vice in the midst of my comrades. For I heard them boast of their disgraceful acts, and glory in them all the more, the more debased they were... But lest I be put to scorn, I made myself more depraved than I was.' Cf. *ibid.*, III, 3, 5-6, where he carefully explains that he never joined in with the antics of the most notorious hell-raisers – the so-called *eversores* 'wreckers' – who evidently took great delight in destroying the innocence of the shy new undergraduates.'

he was mocked by his elders.⁵⁴ Clearly, though, the Christianity of his upbringing had made some sort of claim on his heart: 'We discovered, Lord, that certain men prayed to You and we learned from them, and imagined You, as far as we could, as some sort of mighty One Who could hear us and help us, even though not appearing before our senses.'⁵⁵ This is apt to strike the reader as a delightful little picture of a small mind making terms with Someone infinitely greater than it. However, such clean and crisp understanding is the privilege of childhood and cannot last long in the tarnishing atmosphere of the world. By the time of his arrival at Carthage, Augustine was an arrogant and gifted young scholar, soon to be the leading student in the School of Rhetoric⁵⁶ and already astounding his teachers with his ability to master the most complicated scientific treatises alone.⁵⁷ He was training for a career in the law and had already cultivated a thoroughly secular outlook. Then, suddenly, quite by chance, he came across a now extinct work by Cicero, the *Hortensius* – apparently an exhortation to philosophy. He had picked it up with mercenary intentions, wanting to copy its eloquence for the law courts, but something in the substance of what Cicero was saying struck him deeply. Reading his description of the initial impression it made upon him, one is tempted to see an awakening of the boy Augustine at Madauros before his world fell apart.⁵⁸ For here was the greatest Roman orator, Cicero, extolling the virtues of wisdom for wisdom's

⁵⁴ *Confess.*, I, 9, 14.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, III, 3, 6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, IV, 16. Something of this precociousness evidently persisted into Augustine's early Christian years. As he would later rue it in his *Retractiones* (*Retr.*, I, 1, 4), he chose to end the first of the dialogues produced at Cassiciacum, *Contra Academicos*, with the following gentle dig at Cicero: 'Read the *Academica*. You will find there that Cicero – for what could be easier – has disposed of my trifling arguments.' (*Contra Acad.*, III, 20, 45).

⁵⁸ The boy that Augustine describes in the following terms: 'I delighted in truth, in such little things and in thoughts about such little things. I did not want to err; I was endowed with a strong memory; I was well instructed in speech; I was refined by friendship. I shunned sadness, dejection, and ignorance.' (*Confess.*, I, 20, 31).

sake. Here was a vindication of everything that Augustine must surely have felt as he first learned as a teenager, to love his work. Here was the dream, so cruelly shattered by the logic of the earthly city through the agency of his parents:

This book changed my affections. It turned my prayers to You, Lord, and caused me to have different purposes and desires. All my vain hopes forthwith became worthless to me, and with incredible ardor of heart I desired undying wisdom. I began to rise up, so that I might return to You. I did not use that book to sharpen my tongue: that I seemed to purchase with the money my mother gave to me, since I was in my nineteenth year and my father had died two years before. I did not use it, then, to sharpen my tongue, nor did it impress me by its way of speaking but rather by what it spoke.⁵⁹



The story of Augustine's early years is the story of how the earthly city fashions its citizens. It is a tale of tragic irony; of circumstances beyond any one person's control; of people being compromised into acting against their better intentions – even the best of people, like Augustine's saintly mother. But above all else it is, as Augustine presents it, a tale of a great and continuous deception in which everyone is implicated because no one is innocent. Everyone is born into the burden of paying a price they do not owe: the price of their circumstances of birth: and in forming themselves in reaction against them,

⁵⁹ *Confess.*, III, 4, 7.

they in turn create the circumstances for the next generation. Such is the logic of the earthly city; for most it is irresistible. In his *Confessiones*, Augustine gives an insight into its operation through the person of his great friend and fellow sufferer, Alypius (as he rather tellingly remarks, Alypius had had a worldly career 'dinned into him by his parents' (*Confess.*, VI, 8, 13)). When Alypius first came to Augustine's classes at Thagaste for instruction, he was an upstanding young man from a high family, marked out by his unusual virtues of character. One of these was his disdain for the gladiatorial shows in the circus. Then one day this happened:

...certain of his friends and fellow students whom he chanced to meet... dragged him with friendly force into the amphitheatre on a day for these cruel and deadly games. All the while he was saying: 'Even if you drag my body into this place, can you fasten my mind and my eyes on such shows? I will be absent, though present, and thus will I overcome both you and them.' When they had entered and taken whatever seats they could, the whole scene was ablaze with the most savage passions. He closed his eyes and forbade his mind to have any part in such evil sights. Would that he had been able to close his ears as well! For when one man fell in the combat, a mighty roar went up from the entire crowd and struck him with such force that he was overcome by curiosity... The shout entered into him through his ears and opened up his eyes. The result was that there was wounded and struck down a spirit that was still bold rather than strong, and that was all the weaker because it presumed upon itself whereas it should have relied upon You... He was no longer the man who entered there, but only one of the crowd that he had joined, and a true comrade of those who had bought him there.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ *Confess.*, VI, 8, 13.

This, for Augustine and others like Seneca,⁶¹ was a poignant example of the mechanism of the earthly city at work. That children escape its worst effects for a time is because of what Augustine calls 'the humility of their estate' (see below); but this, as he experienced it, is an all too brief interlude before the full rigours of citizenship are taken up. And this is when the illusion properly begins, for this is the time for growing up into the earthly city's myth of progress and development – a myth based upon violently denying that all of human endeavour forms this single depressing piece:

And what was I so loathe to put up with, and what did I so fiercely denounce, if I caught others at it, as what I did to them? If I was caught and argued with, I chose to fight rather than to give in. Is this boyish innocence? It is not, O Lord, it is not: I pray You, my God, that I may say it. For these are the practices that pass from tutors and teachers, and from nuts and balls and birds, to governors and kings, and to money and estates and slaves. These very things pass on, as older years come in their turn, just as heavier punishments succeed the birch rod. Therefore, it was the symbol of humility found in the child's estate that You, our King, approved when You said, "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven" [Matt. 19: 14].⁶²

⁶¹ See, for instance, the following advice from Seneca to Lucilius, prompted by the former's disgust at the gladiatorial shows: 'When a mind is impressionable and has none too firm a hold on what is right, it must be rescued from the crowd: it is so easy for it to go over to the majority. A Socrates, Cato or a Laelius might have been shaken in his principles by a multitude of people different from himself: such is the measure of the inability of any of us, even as we perfect our personality's adjustment, to withstand the onset of vices when they come with such a mighty following.' (Seneca (tr. Robin Campbell), *Letters from a Stoic*, pp. 42-43). And see also Edmund Burke's dictum that 'imitation is the school of mankind; he will learn from none other'.

⁶² *Confess.*, I, 19, 30.

Chapter 9

THE EARTHLY CITY

From His Nineteenth to His Thirty-Second Year

There comes a time in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, when Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, fallen in the field at Austerlitz, undergoes a most profound change in his outlook:

Above him there was now only the sky – the lofty sky, not clear yet still immeasurably lofty, with grey clouds creeping softly across it. 'How quiet, peaceful and solemn! Quite different from when I was running,' thought Prince Andrei. 'Quite different from us running and shouting and fighting. Not at all like the gunner and the Frenchman dragging the mop from one another with frightened, frantic faces. How differently do these clouds float across that lofty limitless sky! How was it I did not see that sky before? And how happy I am to have found it at last! Yes, all is vanity, all is delusion except these infinite heavens. There is nothing, nothing but that. But even it does not exist, there is nothing but peace and stillness. Thanks be to God!...' ¹

Some time later, having been removed by the French to one of their dressing stations for treatment, he finally encounters his hero Napoleon, who has ridden up to inspect the captured Russian officers:

Although five minutes previously Prince Andrei had been able to say a few words to the soldiers who were carrying him, now with his eyes fixed steadily on

¹ Leo Tolstoy (tr. Rosemary Edmonds), *War and Peace* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1974), p. 326.

Napoleon he was silent... So trivial seemed to him at that moment all the interests that engrossed Napoleon, so petty did his hero with his paltry vanity and delight in victory appear, compared to that lofty, righteous and kindly sky which he had seen and comprehended, that he could not answer him.²

What exactly was Prince Andrei experiencing here? By a few carefully chosen remarks, Tolstoy leaves his reader in no doubt that it was a return to a previous state of humility: 'The quiet home life and peaceful happiness of Bald Hills passed before [Prince Andrei's] imagination. He was enjoying that happiness when that little Napoleon suddenly appeared with his indifferent, narrow look of satisfaction at the misery of others, and was followed by doubts and torments, and only the heavens promised peace.'³

The suggestion here being made is that through the character of Prince Andrei, and the effect created in his mind by the sharp contrasts of the battlefield and the sky – of War and Peace – Tolstoy has described the kind of intellectual experience that Augustine had when reading Cicero's *Hortensius*. And what is perhaps more important still, Tolstoy has successfully illustrated the limitations of this kind of experience by intimating that it could conceivably happen anywhere the contrasts of War and Peace are felt strongly enough to make their claims on the minds of thoughtful men. Tolstoy has also shown that this experience tends to have its effect through the memory: that it brings to mind that period in childhood when humility makes an uncomplicated and enduring happiness possible: that precious period before full initiation into citizenship of the earthly city

² Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, p. 340.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

begins. In his *Confessiones*, Augustine records that it was to just such a period of humility that his mind turned upon having read the *Hortensius*:

But I was delighted with the exhortation only because by its argument I was stirred up and enkindled and set aflame to love, and pursue, and attain and catch hold of, and strongly embrace not this or that sect, but wisdom itself, whatsoever it might be [here Augustine is expressing the general, limited and purely intellectual nature of his experience]. In so great a blaze only this checked me, that Christ's name was not in it. For this name, O Lord, according to Your mercy, this name of my Saviour, Your Son, my tender heart had holily drunken in with my mother's milk and kept deep down within itself. Whatever lacked this name, no matter how learned and polished and veracious it was, could not wholly capture me. I accordingly decided to turn my mind to the Holy Scriptures and to see what they were like.⁴

Augustine's disappointment upon turning to the Scriptures is legendary. It is a disappointment that many have felt who have tried to find in them the clue to a salvation conceived along human lines. As improving literature, they are, at best, anachronistic; even in Augustine's time the morality exhibited in the Old Testament was unconscionable. What is more, they do not seem able to furnish an intellectually satisfying explanation of the genesis of the earth and the workings of the human condition. Finally, as works of art, it is only necessary to point out that they were not written by distinguished men of letters; nor for that matter, were they written with any particular stylistic considerations in mind: what grace and eloquence they possess comes

⁴ *Confess.*, III, 4, 8-5, 9.

entirely from their substance. In short, the Scriptures confound all the usual expectations associated with salvation literature. For the fact is that they simply do not address themselves to the man who has had Augustine's kind of intellectual experience:

And behold, I see something within them that was neither revealed to the proud nor made plain to children, that was lowly on one's entrance but lofty on further advance, and that was veiled over in mysteries. None such as I was at that time could enter into it, nor could I bend my neck for its passageways. When I first turned to that Scripture, I did not feel towards it as I am speaking now, but it seemed to me unworthy of comparison with the nobility of Cicero's writings. My swelling pride turned away from its humble style, and my sharp gaze did not penetrate into its inner meaning. But in truth it was of its nature that its meaning would increase together with your little ones, whereas I disdained to be a little child and, puffed up with pride, I considered myself to be a great fellow.⁵

(a) The myth of innocence

It has now been established that conversions of the sort that Augustine underwent while reading the *Hortensius* draw their force from an appeal to the myth of innocent and unencumbered childhood. This is a political myth in as much as it describes a charmed state of being prior to the taking up of full earthly citizenship. But it is also a philosophical myth in as much as it seems to suggest the possibility of human moral and intellectual perfection. To those who have become sufficiently disillusioned with the world, its processes and logic, the myth of (childhood) innocence is often the only meaningful point of reference that they can find in their own experiences. The question

⁵ *Confess.*, III, 5, 9.

'how have things come to this pass?' contains within itself an answer patterned on the presumption of a golden age, and suggestive of the possibility of a return to it – of renewal, and then a new departure from it. In this respect it is no great surprise that psychology has also been powerfully influenced by this myth of innocence. In particular, the method of psychoanalysis is underwritten by the belief that psychological formation consists in a pristine child negotiating the imperfect and artificial impositions of family and society: 'With irresistible might it will be impressed on you by what processes of development, of repression, and of sublimation and reaction there arises out of the child, with its peculiar gifts and tendencies, the so-called normal man, the bearer and partly the victim of our painfully acquired civilization.'⁶ As a result, psychoanalysis promises enlightenment, freedom and happiness through an engineered return, down through the layers of repression and compromise, to the pristine child. In this respect it furnishes a palmary example of the nature of human expectations about salvation. The other palmary example is evidently Augustine:

Food in dreams is very like the food of waking men, but sleepers are not fed by it: they merely sleep. But those fantasies were in nowise similar to You, as You have now told me, because they were corporeal fantasies, false bodies, and real bodies, whether in the heavens or on earth, which we see by bodily sight, are more certain than they. These things we behold in common with beasts of the field and birds of the air, and they are more certain than those which we conjure up in imagination. Again, there is more certainty when we fashion mental images of these real things

⁶ Sigmund Freud, 'The Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis', *The American Journal of Psychology*, Vol. XXI (1910), No. 2, pp. 181-218.

than when by means of them we picture other vaster and unlimited bodies that do not exist at all. On such empty phantasms was I fed – and yet I was not fed.⁷

Augustine's point is that at this stage, he was the hopeless prisoner of a perspective which would later strike him as outrageously presumptuous.⁸ He had undergone a perfectly common experience – albeit with unusual vividness (partly to be explained, one suspects, by the sharp lines of War and Peace laid down in his childhood) – and was now presuming to be able to see in it a route out of the selfishness, pride and greed of the earthly city. In the myth of innocence; in the memory of his boyish happiness at Madauros; untroubling and untroubled as he learnt: he had seen the vindication and consummation of the truth that all fallen men seek. Not the truth that causes men to be, '...cast down and broken by You, my God...'⁹ but the truth that can cast no shadow on the myth of innocence because it is its reflection:

So because the more obvious and manifest Church which was going to come from the Gentiles was signified in the younger son, Jacob is said to have cooked the lentils and Esau to have eaten them. After all, the Gentiles gave up the idols they used to worship, but the Jews were for serving idols. Their thoughts, you see, turned back to Egypt as they were led through the desert. Even after their enemies had been slain in the sea and overwhelmed by the waves, they desired to make an idol because they could not see Moses. They did not realize that God was present among them, but all their hope was placed in the presence of a man; and when they could not see the man with their eyes, they began to think that God was no longer there, since it was only through Moses that He had performed such great things.

⁷ *Confess.*, III, 6, 10.

⁸ See *ibid.*, VII, 20, 26.

⁹ *Ibid.*, IV, 1, 1.

They sought a man with their bodily eyes, since they had no eyes of the mind with which to see God in Moses. So they forfeited their right as firstborn because, their hearts turning back to Egypt, they ate the lentils... Those... who are materialistic in life, materialistic in faith, materialistic in hope, materialistic in love, still belong to the old testament, not yet the new. They still share the lot of Esau, not yet in the blessing of Jacob.¹⁰

Here is one of the great themes of Augustine's mature theology: the contention that, '...each man, because he derives his origin from a condemned stock, is at first necessarily evil and fleshly, because he comes from Adam; but if, being reborn, he advances in Christ, he will afterwards be good and spiritual.'¹¹ It is against this necessity of death and resurrection for each man that the myth of innocence squarely stands; and in practical terms its chief consequence is man's predilection to return to Egypt: to fashion a god and a salvation in terms of human categories of understanding.¹² As Augustine would eventually come to realise, it makes for a very strange predicament indeed; and in another sermon to his parishioners, he would try to explain this by means of an analogy:

And so when we're told that we are going to be in Paradise, we think of some pleasant garden. And if we think of something on a grander scale than we are accustomed to see, we are still only amplifying the same kind thing. If, for example, we are accustomed to seeing small trees, we think of them as big, and if we are used to this or that kind of apples or fruits, we think of them as larger. If we're used to seeing meadows of a certain size, we can unroll them in our minds to a limitless immensity, but we're still only increasing in our thoughts the same things as we have got to know with our eyes. Again, when we hear that God

¹⁰ *Serm.*, 4, 12.

¹¹ *De civ. Dei.*, XV, 1.

¹² See above, pp. 167-169.

'dwells in light inaccessible,' we measure that light from this kind that we perceive with our eyes, and amplify it to an infinite degree, but we still do it by increasing this that we know, whereas in fact that light is of a totally different kind; it is the light, after all, not of eyes but of minds.¹³

It was evidently just this kind of intellectual arrogance – an intellectual arrogance vindicated by presumptions concerning the fundamental integrity of human nature and the perspectives attaching to it – that Augustine believed characterised the period from his reading of the *Hortensius* to his thirty-first birthday. Like Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, lying in the field at Austerlitz, he had become inflamed with a vague but intoxicating love for life itself – vague because it was a 'negative' love, that is, a love merely for everything that the earthly city is not. And as F. P. Ramsey has warned, 'The chief danger to our philosophy, apart from laziness and wooliness, is scholasticism... which is treating what is vague as if it were precise...'¹⁴ Many years later, towards the end of his days, as the Vandals were massing outside the walls of Hippo and his parishioners had been reduced by the most horrific trials and outrages, to an intense love for life in all its simplest manifestations, Augustine would draw on this memory in order better to sympathize with their plight. It would produce an absolutely characteristic sermon, that is, an intrinsically political sermon dealing with the great themes of citizenship, obligations and happiness, but this time touchingly softened by Augustine's knowledge of what his flock were going through:

¹³ *Serm.*, CCCLXB, 3.

¹⁴ F. P. Ramsey, quoted in Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* Vol., II (London, Routledge, 1962), p. 9.

Consider the two deaths: the first one is temporal while the second is eternal. The first death is given to all: the second is given only to the wicked, the impious, the unfaithful, the blasphemers and all those who set themselves up against healing doctrine. Pay careful attention: place the two deaths before you. If it were at all possible, you would not wish to suffer either; for I know well that you want to live, not die... and I know how you want to pass from this life to the other without going through death and resurrection, but living: that is, by some process of renovation. This is what you would want – it is the natural human tendency to want it. The human soul itself, though how I do not know, wills it and desires it. Because from the very moment that it begins to love life it abhors death; for so long as it does not abhor its own flesh, as it were, it should not want anything to occur that could harm it.¹⁵

(b) Manichaeism

Buoyed by the myth of innocence and dangerously in love with life,¹⁶ Augustine fell in with one of the strangest religions ever to make an appearance in the West. Manichaeism

¹⁵ *Serm.*, CCCXLIV, 4. Brown gives a variant reading of this passage in his *Augustine of Hippo*: 'I know you want to keep on living. You do not want to die. And you want to pass from this life to another in such a way that you will not rise again, as a dead man, but fully alive and transformed.' (p. 431). The sense is really quite different. Instead of conveying the idea that it is in human nature not to want to have to pass through death in order to be resurrected (as strange as Augustine seems to think it is that such an illogical idea could lodge so tightly in the human soul), it presents a substantially different concern: namely, the question what sort of bodies, if at all, men can expect to inhabit after their final resurrection (this is a question which he treats in some detail at *De civ. Dei*, XIII, 23). And what is more, the reading here favoured seems to be borne out quite straightforwardly by the note on which Augustine chooses to end this section of his sermon: 'The blood of your Saviour is given for you on condition that you want it. Perhaps, however, you would rather say something along these lines: "It is true that my Lord has the blood which can save me; but at His Passion He shed it for everyone; what, then, can possibly remain for me now? This is the great mystery: that he shed it one time, but that at the same time he shed it for all. The blood of Christ is salvation for whomever accepts it; it is condemnation for whomever refuses it. If, then, you do not want to die [that is, you do not want to accept the blood of Christ], what do you possibly think can save you from the second death? You will not be liberated from it unless you take up your cross and follow The Lord; because He took up His cross and looked to obey."' (*Serm.*, CCCXLIV, 4).

¹⁶ At a time when the ascetic ideal was strong and Western monasticism was developing into its present shape, Augustine's keen sensitivity to the natural goods of human society could strike a contemporary

was in every sense a product of its time, and for that reason, peculiarly well-adapted to the sensibilities and aspirations of men of Augustine's type. A syncretising religion made out of elements drawn from the ancient Babylonian or Persian religion, as well as Christianity and Buddhism, the chief appeal of Manichaeism lay in its claim to have rationalized these elements in an intellectually satisfying system. In this sense it offers the intellectual historian a unique insight into the moral and religious expectations of educated men at this crucial time in the intellectual history of the West. For here was a religion made completely in man's own image¹⁷ at that point in history – effectively fossilizing for the inspection of future generations, an ancient attitude of mind around the turn of the third-century A.D.¹⁸

What, in essence, was the appeal of the religion which Mani founded in his native Persia, in 242 A.D.? In large part it was a quality that Karl Popper would later define in relation to what he regarded as the great modern pseudo-sciences of Marxism, Freudianism, and the psychological theories associated with Alfred Adler:

I found that those of my friends who were admirers of Marx, Freud, and Adler, were impressed by a number of points common to these theories, and especially by their apparent *explanatory power*. These theories appeared to be able to explain practically everything that happened within the fields to which they referred. The study of them seemed to have the effect of an intellectual conversion or revelation, opening your eyes to a new truth hidden from those not yet initiated. Once your

observer as subversive. Even his biographer, friend and fellow bishop, Possidius, could not help from inserting this note of censure into his hagiography: 'He loved life too much'. By the terms of this dissertation, this attitude of Augustine's would be accounted for out of the studied indifference of his poise and perspective on earthly matters.

¹⁷ See *Confess.*, IV, 14, 22: 'Thus at that time I loved men upon the judgement of men, and not upon Your judgments, my God, by which no one is deceived.'

¹⁸ For more on Manichaeism as an episode in the intellectual history of the West, see below, pp. 255-257.

eyes were thus opened you saw confirming instances everywhere: the world was full of *verifications* of the theory. Whatever happened always confirmed it. Thus its truth appeared manifest; and unbelievers were clearly people who did not want to see the manifest truth; who refused to see it, either because it was against their class interest, or because of the repressions which were still 'un-analysed' and crying aloud for treatment.¹⁹

This terrifying vision of a diagnosis that none may legitimately challenge because it explains away explanation itself, probably comes closest to describing the significant appeal of Manichaeism to men like the young Augustine. In a time before the compartmentalization of knowledge and the specialisms associated with modern academic disciplines, they wanted and expected to be able to monopolise truth in a single all-embracing theory. Such aspirations are rare today; indeed the last serious and sustained attempt to do this was probably the *Encyclopédie*, planned and prosecuted in the eighteenth-century by the French philosophes.²⁰ Due significance should be attached to the fact, then, that some years later, during the excitements of Cassiciacum, Augustine would conceive his own intellectual project along these lines: an encyclopaedia of learning arranged to show that all knowledge has its consummation in God. Tellingly he would only complete its first section – the work preserved as *De Musica* – before abandoning the project just a year later in the wake of his public act of confession: *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*.²¹

¹⁹ Karl R. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), pp. 34-35.

²⁰ See the article, 'Encyclopaedists', in *OCP*, pp. 229-230.

²¹ This encyclopaedia would have been called the *Disciplinarum libri*.

For the time being, however, Manichaeism was able to provide everything that Augustine might expect from a theory of truth in the later Roman empire. It laid out a complete and detailed cosmology worked out in respectably materialist terms. It offered an involving code of life with sensible provisions for the more and less ascetically-minded. But what was perhaps more attractive still, it offered an explanation of the fact of War and Peace in the world – of evil and good – based firmly in the myth of innocence:

Even at Rome [that is, when he was in his twenty-ninth year]... I still thought that it was not ourselves who sin, but some sort of different nature within us commits the sin. It gave joy to my pride to be above all guilt, and when I did an evil deed, not to confess that I myself had done it, so that You might heal my soul, since it had sinned against You. I loved to excuse myself, and to accuse I know not what other being that was present with me but yet was not I. But in truth I was the one whole being, and my own impiety had divided me against myself. That sin was the more incurable whereby I judged myself to be no sinner.²²

It was evidently in this fact that the enduring appeal of Manichaeism lay for Augustine; at any rate, it outlasted all his purely intellectual interests in the religion which had begun to wane fairly early on, and which would decisively be given up once Faustus of Milevis, the great Manichaean teacher, had shown himself unable satisfactorily to answer Augustine's more pressing, scientific questions.²³ In this continuing commitment to an abstract, conceptual truth, and in his corresponding hopes of engineering his own salvation from the point of view of his pristine beginning,

²² *Confess.*, V, 10, 18.

²³ For the details of this event see *Confess.*, V, 3; 6 & 7.

Augustine would emphatically declare his citizenship of the earthly city for a full nine years.²⁴ If, as was suggested above in Chapter One, the measure of Augustine's influence over the political tradition of the West is best described in terms of his achievement in presenting it with the vision which it must at all costs reject – that is to say, the vision against which it must constantly seek to position and assert itself in theory and in practice – then here is the young Augustine himself rejecting that vision. Here is the young Augustine rejecting the truth which A. E. Housman was able to convey in just these few closing lines from his poem 'Germinal': 'In ancient shadows and twilights / Where childhood has strayed, / The world's great sorrows were born and its heroes were made. / In the lost boyhood of Judas / Christ was betrayed.'²⁵

(c) *Skepticism*

Augustine's nine years with the Manichees would reveal an important aspect to his character: his stark intellectual honesty. It is clear that from an early age he was unusually committed to extracting the truth from situations, and not at all squeamish with his delivery of it either. Indeed it seems to have been a constant source of anxiety to him that the earthly city conspired to present him with circumstances which made this happy task increasingly difficult. Reading the opening books of the *Confessiones*, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that had Augustine been better disposed to make the logic of the earthly city his own, then he would surely have had an easier childhood and adolescence. He would not, for instance, have been so troubled by his propensity to sin and would in

²⁴ See *ibid.*, IV, 1, 1: 'For the same period of nine years, from the nineteenth year of my age to the twenty-eighth, we were seduced and we seduced others, deceived and deceiving by various desires, both openly by the so-called liberal arts and secretly in the name of a false religion, proud in the one, superstitious in the other, and everywhere vain.'

²⁵ A. E. Housman, 'Germinal'.

all probability have grown up more in the image of his father. But this, the fate of so many sons, was not to be Augustine's. For from the first he would be prepared to take the world on with the only weapon that a boy has: not innocence, because he is fallen; but reason allied to the laws of nature, and nourished by the precious humility of the boyish estate.²⁶

This willingness to challenge the logic of the earthly city has long made Augustine the subject of ridicule and outright hostility in the West: for it cuts at the root of what so many have chosen to invest in the institutions and processes of the world. At the very least Augustine's is felt to be a most unhelpful and unpractical attitude, seriously out of touch with the willingness of most to live a quiet life, comforted by the equal failings of their fellows. To the majority of his modern commentators Augustine's attitude to sin in general, and his own sin in particular, is 'neurotic'.²⁷ And this only seems to be confirmed by the fact of how relatively well he lived. He was not a notable tearaway as a boy; indeed his most notorious crime seems to have been the pointless theft with some friends of the fruit of his neighbour's pear tree²⁸ – just the type of prank that has its counterpart in every boy's experience. Then as a young man and a student at the University of Carthage he chose not to pursue the reckless (but evidently acceptable) ways of his peers and settled instead into a stable, loving relationship with a woman, whilst at the same time addressing himself seriously to his own intellectual development.

²⁶ See above, pp. 157-159, for an explanation of how this intellectual honesty fits into the mature Augustinian scheme of salvation.

²⁷ As Dyson puts it in the context of a discussion of the contribution of Augustine's personality to his mature moral epistemology, 'Looked at objectively, Augustine's sensitivity to his own failings seems neurotic.' (Dyson, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, p. 16).

²⁸ For the details of this see *Confess.*, II, 4-10.

There seems, then, to have been nothing in the events of Augustine's early life to have prompted the introspection for which he would later become infamous. By the standards of the world these events are innocuous, endearing even; but certainly not deserving of the kind of analysis to which Augustine subjects them. Evidently, then, their significance to him must lie in something beyond their immediate status in the catalogue of sins. This seems in part to be confirmed by the emphasis which Augustine places on the sheer pointlessness of his theft of the pears: 'For I stole a thing of which I had plenty of my own and of much better quality. Nor did I wish to enjoy that thing which I desired to gain by theft, but rather to enjoy the actual theft and the sin of theft.'²⁹ As has already been shown in a number of places,³⁰ this conviction that (contrary to the vanity of the popular imagination) all human endeavour forms a single depressing piece is one of the great themes of the mature Augustinian outlook. As a social and political commentator, it allows him to strike a surprisingly contemporary pose – reassuringly dismissive of teleologies of progress and for that reason, comfortably in line with the limited, reductionist expectations of the postmodernist perspective.³¹ As a man, however, it seems to make him the subject of immediate suspicion; for historically there has been very little tolerance of men like Augustine who by their stark intellectual honesty put the hopes and achievements of their fellows into a bad light. Socrates, who performed a similar service for his fellow Athenians, was eventually put to death by them; and in respect of this fact, his answer to his accusers, immortalized in Plato's dialogue *The Apology*, does very well for Augustine too:

²⁹ *Confess.*, II, 4, 9.

³⁰ For an example, see above, pp. 90-91.

³¹ For more on postmodernism as an analytical perspective in political studies see Colin Hay, *Political Analysis: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002), pp. 216-245.

And now, O men who have condemned me, I would fain prophesy to you; for I am about to die, and in the hour of death men are gifted with prophetic power. And I prophesy to you who are my murderers, that immediately after my departure punishment far heavier than you have inflicted on me will surely await you. Me you have killed because you wanted to escape the accuser, and not to give an account of your lives... If you think that by killing men you can prevent some one from censuring your evil lives, you are mistaken; that is not a way of escape that is either possible or honourable; the easiest and noblest way is not to be disabling others, but to be improving yourselves.³²

It is because he seems genuinely to have searched all his life for the truth that reproves, that Augustine found himself continuously out of alignment with the earthly city: "I am needy and poor," but I am a better man so long as by secret groans I displease myself and seek Your mercy, until my defect is made over again and is made whole again, unto that peace which the proud man's eye does not perceive.'³³ Unusually well-equipped to pursue this calling,³⁴ he got further than most in his childhood years and suffered greatly as a result. It seems to have been his misfortune to realise early on that the earthly city is a common enterprise ranged against 'that peace which the proud man's eye does not perceive'. As he grew up he became a very proud man indeed, and evidently with good reason for being so; but it seems that at the same time he could not abandon himself completely to the ways of his fellow citizens. 'Give me chastity and continence,

³² Plato (tr. Benjamin Jowett), 'The Apology', in Jowett and Caird (eds.), *The Four Socratic Dialogues of Plato*, pp. 88-89.

³³ *Confess.*, X, 38, 63.

³⁴ For Augustine's own sober assessment of his natural intellectual abilities see *Confess.*, IV, 16.

but not yet!’,³⁵ he apparently prayed as a young man, fearful that God might indeed bring to an immediate end this particularly enjoyable part of his ‘pilgrimage’.³⁶

This inability fully to sentimentalize his experiences and become lost entirely to the romance of the myth of innocence emerges as a key component in Augustine’s character from a relatively early age. That he was not sentimental in the plainest possible sense is surely attested to by the fact that his written output contains only one known poem.³⁷ As a character trait, this lack of sentimentality would combine with his stark intellectual honesty to prevent him from finding relief in the kind of moral self-satisfaction granted to less discriminating souls. In this sense the charge of ‘neurosis’ so often leveled at Augustine and men like him is misleading: for the world has historically shown itself to be a very poor judge of what should count as an excessive attention to personal moral failing. When all due allowance for the custom of another age has been taken into account, there is, for instance, nothing that Augustine castigates in himself that is not recognisably a sin. By the strict medical definition of the term his attitude cannot therefore be considered neurotic.³⁸ And as for the low tolerance of this kind of attitude in the popular mind, this is a question which exposes the logic of the earthly city at what Augustine would later consider to be its weakest point: pride:

³⁵ *Confess.*, VIII, 7, 17.

³⁶ The use of the word ‘pilgrimage’ in brackets is a direct reference to Jean Bethke Elshtain’s position as given in Chapter Six. There it was shown that Elshtain effectively takes this classic Western understanding of ‘pilgrimage’ for Augustine’s mature conception, involving her in a fundamental misunderstanding of the motives behind Augustine’s specifically political ideas. What can now be said with some degree of precision, is that Elshtain’s sympathies seem to lie predominately with the ‘old’ Augustine rather than the new.

³⁷ It was written in praise of the Paschal candle.

³⁸ According to the article, ‘Neurosis’, in Richard L. Gregory (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to the Mind* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 549-550, Augustine could only qualify as a ‘neurotic’ if his attitude to his sin represented a, ‘...persistent anxiety out of keeping with the immediate circumstances.’

Pay attention my brothers. Let me try to say it if I can, and let me not be afraid. I won't keep silent. I am compelled to speak. Even if some people are angry with me, still they must pardon me. Oh yes, I'm afraid, as I said. I hope they will pardon my fear. Christ was afraid of no one. But I am afraid of Christ, and that is why I do not spare others, or else He may not spare me for being reluctant to hurt such people's feelings.³⁹

It was probably to be expected that such an unusually rigorous habit of mind should bring Augustine through Manichaeism and into a brief association with the skeptical philosophy of the Academics: 'The thought arose in me that those philosophers whom they call the Academics were wiser than the rest. They were of the opinion that all things are doubtful, and they decreed that no truth can be comprehended by man.'⁴⁰ Augustine was at Rome during this time, characteristically unable to break completely with his Manichean friends even though he was now quite certain that their philosophy had nothing to offer him. Evidently his problem was that he was, '...hat[ing] the truth for the sake of that very thing which [he was] lov[ing] instead of the truth.'⁴¹ This was his desire, '...to be above all guilt, and when I did an evil deed, not to confess that I myself had done it...'⁴² This base desire rubbed up against the nobler instincts of his character – his unsentimental outlook and stark intellectual honesty – and issued in a distressing ambivalence.

³⁹ *Serm.*, IV, 32.

⁴⁰ *Confess.*, V, 10, 18.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, X, 23, 34.

⁴² *Confess.*, V, 10, 18.

Augustine was still very much involved in his citizenship of the earthly city and destined to remain that way so long as he continued to conceive his salvation in terms of the engineered renovation of a fundamentally sound nature. But a nagging doubt as to the viability of this enterprise – truly the mark of his genius as it has here been presented – kept up the unquiet in his heart and ensured that his association with the Academics would be brief and relatively unimportant; though not without a kind of symbolic significance. Years later, as Augustine was facing God in the garden of the villa at Milan, he would be able to admit the following to Him: ‘I thought that the reason I deferred from day to day to reject worldly hopes and to follow You alone was because there seemed nothing certain by which I could direct my course.’⁴³ But evidently this noble attitude had been an indulgence dreamt up by Augustine to keep him from having to turn his mind to the less elevating certainties of his fallen heart: “Where is your tongue? You said, forsooth, that you would not cast off your burden of vanity for the sake of an uncertain truth. See, now it [the unsavoury truth of your heart] is certain, and yet that burden still weighs you down, while men who neither wore themselves out in search of truth, nor meditated for ten years and more on such things, win wings for their readier shoulders.”⁴⁴ It was out of considerations such as these that Augustine would later come to appreciate how the (abstract, conceptual) truth of the philosophers is a perfect reflection of the myth of innocence; and how by being so it is, in effect, a perfect reflection of the conditions of the citizenship of the earthly city too:

...you despise [Christ] because of the body that He received from a woman, and because of the shame of the Cross. Your exalted wisdom rejects such lowly and

⁴³ *Ibid.*, VIII, 7, 18.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII, 8, 18.

abject things, and looks to higher regions. But He fulfils what the holy prophets truly foretold of Him: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to naught the prudence of the prudent.' [Isa. 29: 14; 1 Cor. 1: 19]... This is what our adversaries despise as weak and foolish, as if they were wise and strong in themselves. Yet this is the grace which heals the weak, who do not proudly boast a false blessedness of their own, but rather humbly confess their own wretchedness.⁴⁵

(d) Neo-Platonism

From the Skepticism of Rome Augustine would move to Milan, '...and to Ambrose, its bishop, a man famed throughout the world as one of its very best men, and Your devout worshipper.'⁴⁶ Here was the man who could have been the father he should have had. Augustine was now thirty years old and the newly elected Professor of Rhetoric at Milan, a public position of considerable prominence given the propensity of the imperial court to reside at Milan in the later fourth-century A.D. Regarding how far he had come in his attempt to make terms with the Christian Scriptures, he was, as he explains, still the victim of a residual materialism from his Manichean days: 'To me it seemed a most base thing to believe that You have the shape of our human flesh and are bounded by the outward lines of our bodily members. I wished to meditate upon my God, but I did not know how to think of Him except as a vast corporeal mass, for I thought that anything not a body was nothing whatsoever.'⁴⁷ But then it seems that the problem of arriving at something that he could believe with a clear intellectual conscience was ceasing to be the issue it had been for Augustine. His unrelenting desire to be done with the earthly city

⁴⁵ *De civ. Dei*, X, 28.

⁴⁶ *Confess.*, V, 13, 23.

⁴⁷ *Confess.*, V, 10, 19.

had had the effect of recasting his initial conception of salvation. As he would later remark to his parishioners: 'But it isn't just a matter of faith, but of faith and works. Each is necessary. For *the demons also believe* – you heard the apostle – *and tremble* (Jas 2: 19); but their believing doesn't do them any good.'⁴⁸

As an arrogant nineteen year old reading Cicero's *Hortensius*, Augustine had been fired to find his salvation in a truth that he could comfortably believe; however, as the evidence of his own experiences gathered to erode this enthusiasm, he came to realise that the innocence in which this conception had been based was a myth, and patently not to be explained away by any dualistic metaphysic.⁴⁹ Neo-Platonism, when it came, would help him to find the idiom in which to express his new conception of salvation: that is, his new conception of the truth that saves. But that would be the extent of its value to Augustine, for otherwise it could not speak into the matter that had come to trouble him most: 'A new will, which had begun within me, to wish freely to worship You and find joy in You, O God, the sole sure delight, was not yet able to overcome that prior will, grown strong with age. Thus did my two wills, the one old, the other new, the first carnal, and the second spiritual, contend with one another, and by their conflict they laid waste to my soul.'⁵⁰ This was the new mould in which Augustine's salvation had come to appear to him under the guiding influence of Ambrose:⁵¹ not an elevating change of mind based

⁴⁸ *Serm.*, XVIA, 11.

⁴⁹ This is a reference to the Manichean doctrine of good and evil. Augustine's comment is that, 'I believed that evil is some substance and that it possesses its own foul and hideous mass... Because some sort of reverence forced me to believe that a good God would create no evil nature, I postulated two masses opposed to one another...' (*Confess.*, V, 10, 20).

⁵⁰ *Confess.*, VIII, 5, 10.

⁵¹ See, for instance, Augustine's remark at *ibid.*, VI, 4, 6, that, '...I often heard Ambrose speaking in his sermons to the people as though he most earnestly commended it as a rule that "the letter kills, but the spirit quickens."' "

in, and vindicated by, the prideful myth of innocence, but a seemingly impossible change of heart:

This was the right mean, and the middle region of my salvation, to remain in Your image, and by serving You to subdue my body [Augustine is referring to his carnal appetites – still healthy at this stage, but not, as has been emphasised, immoderate]. But when I would rise up in pride against You, and run against the Lord with the thick boss of my shield, even these lowest things were set against me and pressed down upon me, and there was never relief of breathing spell. From all sides they rushed upon me in hordes and heaps as I gazed at them, and as I took thought and turned back from them, the images of bodily things set upon me, as if to say, ‘Where are you going, O foul and unworthy man?’ Such things grew out of my wound, for You humble the proud man, like one who has been wounded. By my swelling wound I was separated from You, and my badly bloated face closed up my eyes.⁵²

Only the writings of St. Paul could address such a developing conception of salvation:

Where [in the books of the Platonists] was that charity which builds upon the foundations of humility, which is Christ Jesus? When would those books teach it to me? It is for this reason, I believe, that You wished me to come upon those books before I read Your Scriptures, so that the way I was affected by them might be stamped upon my memory. Hence, later on, when I was made gentle by Your books, and my wounds had been treated by Your soothing fingers, I would be able to detect and distinguish how great a difference lies between presumption and contrition, and between those who see where they must travel, but do not see the way, and those who see the way that leads not only to beholding our blessed

⁵² *Ibid.*, VII, 9, 14.

fatherland but also to dwelling therein... So it was with the most intense desire that

I seized upon the sacred writings of Your Spirit, and especially the Apostle Paul.⁵³

* * * * *

In the space of fifteen years Augustine had come full circle; he had, in other words, gained nearly nothing by his efforts to fashion an intellectual meeting place with God. For of course he had got God all wrong from the start. Like all children, he had unconsciously made Him in the image of the only viable source of male power and authority in his little life: his father.⁵⁴ Consequently it was to be a profound shock to him to realise that unlike his father, God did very much care for his spiritual development! That in fact He cared for it to the extinction of his intellectual development, and was correspondingly willing to take him in hand and address the most pressing concerns of his heart. And in this sense it is really the boy Augustine whom the intellectual historian finds standing on the cusp of Christianity at the age of thirty-two. For by facing who he was – who he had become – Augustine had effectively returned to the question that had remained unanswered since his boyhood: the question why the politics of the earthly city is dominated by such a tragic irony – an irony that passes from fathers to sons, and whose

⁵³ *Confess.*, VII, 20, 26.

⁵⁴ As was pointed out above in Chapter Six, with reference to Xenophanes (p. 158), it has long been recognised that without prior knowledge of the gods, men must logically make them in their own image. Augustine alludes to this at *Serm.*, IX, 9: 'God wants to make you like Him, and you are trying to make God like you. Be satisfied with God as He is, not as you would like Him to be. You are all twisted, and you want God to be like what you are, not like what He is. But if you are satisfied with Him as He is, then you will correct yourself and align your heart along that straight rule from which you are now all warped and twisted. Be satisfied with God as He is, love Him as He is.'

protection is the fact that for the natural pride of the human race, it will never seriously be questioned:

And such is the perversity of the human race, that sometimes I'm afraid a chaste man will feel ashamed in lewd company. That's why I never stop plucking this string. Because of this crooked custom and blemish, as I said, on the whole human race. If any of you committed murder, which God forbid, you would want to drive him out of the country, and get rid of him immediately if possible. If anyone steals, you hate him and don't wish to see him. If anyone gives false evidence you abominate him and regard him as scarcely human. If anyone covets someone else's property he is considered unjust and rapacious. If anyone has tumbled in the hay with his maids, he is admired, he is given a friendly welcome, the injuries are turned into jokes. But if a man comes along who says he is chaste, does not commit adultery, and is known not to do so, then he is ashamed to join the company of those others who are not like him, in case they insult him and laugh at him because he is not a man. So this is what human perversity has come to, that someone conquered by lust is considered a man, and someone who has conquered lust is not considered a man. The winners are celebrating and they are not men; the losers lie flat on their faces, and they are men! If you were a spectator in the amphitheater, would you be the sort of spectator who thought the man cowering before the wild animal was braver than the man who killed the wild animal?⁵⁵

⁵⁵ *Serm.*, 9, 12; tr. Edmund Hill, O.P.

Chapter 10

THE HEAVENLY CITY

From His Thirty-Second to his Thirty-Fourth Year

This chapter is dominated by a single principle of history laid down many years ago by Glover: that, 'In history as in science there is no democracy among facts; all, it is true, have the same right to be understood, but some facts are of vastly more significance than others. The scholar, for whom all facts are of significance and all of equal significance, never understands anything, though Nature is kind to him and conceals from him that there is anything to understand.'¹

As Plato once showed, democracy is arguably the concept most characteristic of a fallen world: for does it not try to make a virtue of the greatest vice of all: that is, the inability of men to arrive at the wisdom of what each should be doing in the actual present in order to bring about the complete happiness of all? Democracy has, in this sense, an agenda; and Plato saw clearly that it was the denigration of the wise and of wisdom. To attempt to democratize facts is to carry this agenda into the academic discipline of history. The democrat historian, though he will claim for his activities the general protection of the idol democracy, has already given up that dispassion which should be the mark and pride of his work. He is now working against history because

¹ Glover, *Christ in the Ancient World*, p. 2.

history is not democratic; and so, in his discomfort at the varying significance of facts, and in his efforts to do something about it through the re-description of reality, he becomes what Augustine would surely have regarded as an archetypal fallen character.

(a) James J. O'Donnell and the democratic approach to Augustinian scholarship

In terms of Augustinian scholarship, the most notorious democrat historian is James J. O'Donnell. So far does he take his democratic agenda that it is difficult to recommend his new biography of Augustine as a serious work of history.² In the acknowledgments appended to his critical edition of Augustine's *Confessiones*, O'Donnell offers the following insight: 'My encounters with Augustine began two decades ago, in an irretrievable place, and remind me at every turn of a friend of whom it can be said, as Augustine said of Nebridius (*Ep.*, XCVIII, 8) that he was a most assiduous and keen-eyed investigator in all matters dealing with doctrine and piety, and that what he hated most of all was a short answer to a long question.'³ If this is the image in which O'Donnell would like to make Augustine, then the result of his labour cannot strictly speaking be called history. He joins the ranks of those, like Elshtain, who need long answers to sustain and occupy their pilgrimages. Consequently his critical edition of Augustine's *Confessiones* begins by tendentiously (his word) re-describing a Biblical verse central to Augustine's mature outlook: John 3: 21. Instead of the standard and uncontested 'He who does the truth comes to light', O'Donnell chooses 'He who *makes* the truth...'. In a note he explains himself thus: 'What "doing the truth" might mean is anybody's guess, and the phrase is probably preferred out of fear of the implication in "making truth" that the truth

² This work is James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York, HarperCollins, 2005).

³ O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, p. lxxii.

does not exist until it is made.’⁴ Bearing in mind what has already been said in this dissertation about Augustine’s own experience of becoming a new creation, this is rather an unfortunate premiss to choose for a commentary on his *Confessiones*. Out of his own failed efforts to engineer his salvation, Augustine learnt firsthand how it is the reproving truth that saves; where the whole point of a ‘reproving truth’ is the fact that it plainly has not been made by men. For if history teaches anything, it is that pride inclines men to make truth that elevates rather than reproves; and this is, after all, the very charge that Augustine would lay at the door of the Manichees in his *Confessiones*. By contrast, ‘doing the truth’ came for him to mean acting on God’s Will in the actual present.

As has now been shown, Augustine gives his own explanation why men persistently choose not to see the varying significance in facts: and irritatingly for men like O’Donnell it amounts to a very short answer indeed. O’Donnell’s reaction, more violent than most, has been to question the truthfulness of a man who could berate himself in his *Retractiones* for not having included grasshoppers in a list of winged creatures while commenting on Genesis!⁵ O’Donnell’s thesis is that the *Confessiones* should be understood primarily as the work of, ‘...a big frog in a small pond...’;⁶ that through them, ‘Augustine provided his own legend as a guarantee of security...’⁷ And why should he seek to do this? Because, ‘To be his father’s son from Tagaste was no great distinction, but he was also a young man who had had a disconcertingly flashy career in

⁴ O’Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, p. xvii.

⁵ See *Retr.*, II, 41, 3.

⁶ O’Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography*, p. 41.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Italy that ended rather abruptly.’⁸ Leaving aside the fact that Augustine was quite prepared to make an example of his humble background in sermons to his parishioners,⁹ there is the significant question whether anybody would have cared. As Brown and so many others have made clear, Late Antique society was remarkable for its fluidity: it was expected that the brilliant sons of poor fathers should succeed in the world. Why else would Patricius have bothered to scrape together the funds for Augustine’s outstanding education? Then finally there is O’Donnell’s readiness to castigate Augustine’s ‘obsessive’ truthfulness about his sins. It seems odd upon reflection, that a man who was truthful about the discrediting facts of his life to the point of obsession should, at the same time, and in the same book, attempt to pull off one of the most elaborate deceptions in literary history. But others have already remarked on O’Donnell’s motives in writing about Augustine.¹⁰ What remains to be said here is simply this: that O’Donnell is, perhaps, the palmary example of a democratizing attitude to history that is apparently premised upon the need to smooth over the more incriminating blemishes on the countenance of the earthly city: ‘We are who our stories tell us we are, we live the way our stories tell us to, and we feel deeply that we are right to do so.’¹¹ and again: ‘Any reading, especially a psychoanalytical reading, of a text such as this should not be judged according to the simplicity it imposes but according to the complexity it reveals.’¹² This postmodernist position on truth is undoubtedly an extreme one to take up, but, as Augustine would have said, it is also emblematic for pressing to breaking point an

⁸ O’Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography*, p. 41.

⁹ See n. 8, p. 174 above.

¹⁰ See, for instance, G. W. Bowersock’s kind review of O’Donnell’s *Augustine: A New Biography* in the *New York Times* (July 31st, 2005).

¹¹ O’Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography*, p. 207.

¹² O’Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, xxxi.

attitude to history (that is, truth) that began with the words 'Did God really say?'¹³ and ended in the possibility 'What is truth?'¹⁴ To Augustine's mind, these two questions measured out the distance of man's fall on the only scale that could tell the full story: the epistemological:

But in their blindness these men, striving to make others blind and failing to see what should be seen, while working to do away with what should be believed, try to call into question what is already an accepted belief the world over. For example, they say by way of reply: 'Do not try to silence us by quoting the whole world as authority. Let us look to Scripture itself. You must not act the demagogue. It is only the multitude led astray that favours you.' In the first place, I have this answer to make: I am favoured by a multitude led astray? This multitude once was a mere handful. What made this multitude grow, a development which was predicted long before? Of course, such growth is not apparent where there is no conception of this 'multitude' as it was before. And no, I do not say there was a mere handful: there was only one person – Abraham! Consider this, Brethren: at that time Abraham stood alone throughout the entire globe, among all men, among all nations; and to this man it was said, 'In thy seed shall all nations be blessed.' [Gen. 22: 18] What this one man believed as a single individual has been presented to many in the multitude of his seed. Then it was not seen and was believed; now it is seen, and is denied; and what was then said to one person, and believed by one person, is now, when it is professed by many, attacked by some few. He Who made His Disciples fishers of men, enclosed within His nets every kind of authority. If it is the multitude that is to be believed, what is better represented everywhere in the world than the Church? If the rich are to be believed, let them note how many rich people

¹³ Gen. 3: 1.

¹⁴ John. 18: 38.

He has taken. If the poor are to be believed, let them take notice of the thousands of poor. If it is to be the nobles, almost all the nobility is within; if kings, let them see all of them subjected to Christ; if the leaders among the eloquent, and learned, and experienced, let them behold what great orators, what scholars, what philosophers of this world have been caught by those fishermen, drawn from the deep of their salvation. Let them think of Him Who, coming down to heal by the example of His own humility the great evil of the human soul, that is, pride, ‘...chose the weak things of the world that He might confound the strong; chose the foolish things of this world that He might confound the wise...’ – not those who really were, but those who only seemed to be – ‘...and chose the base things of this world... and things that are not, that He might bring to nought things that are.’ [1 Cor. 1: 27].¹⁵

(b) The method of this chapter

The climax of Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* sees the hero, Raskolnikoff, bring to a sudden and dramatic end the four hundred and so pages of his attempt to clothe the worst of crimes in the best of intentions. Kneeling down in the middle of a busy market-place in St. Petersburg, he performs what Dostoyevsky apparently regarded as an intensely political act:

The market-place was now full of people. This fact displeased Raskolnikoff greatly; nevertheless he went to that part of it where the crowd was thickest. He would have bought solitude at any price, but he felt that he could not enjoy it for a single moment. Having got to the centre of the place, the young man suddenly recalled Sonia’s words: ‘Go to some public place, bow to the crowd, kiss the earth you have soiled by your sin, and say in a loud voice, in the presence of everyone: “I

¹⁵ *Serm.*, LI, 4.

am a murderer.”” At the recollection of this he trembled in every limb. The anguish of the last few days had hardened his heart to such an extent, that he felt satisfied to find himself yet open to feelings of another kind, and gave himself entirely up to this one. Sincere sorrow overpowered him, his eyes filled with tears. He knelt in the very middle of the place, bowed earthwards, and joyfully kissed the miry ground. After having risen, he knelt down once more.

‘There’s a fellow who has got a tile loose!’ observed a lad standing by...

‘He is a pilgrim bound for Jerusalem, lads; he is taking leave of his children and his native land; he is wishing everybody goodbye, even St. Petersburg and the ground of the capital,’ added a respectable man, slightly the worse for drink.¹⁶

It is precisely in the image of this spectacular declaration of citizenship that Augustine’s own confession will be understood in this chapter.

(c) In the garden at Milan

Augustinian scholars have long debated the significance of Augustine’s conversion in the garden of his friend’s villa at Milan, constructing their debates around the question what it was that he was actually converted to. Bearing in mind the trajectory of what has just been said in Chapters Eight and Nine, this must now be considered the wrong question to ask; for by the time he stumbled into the garden at Milan, Augustine had long ceased to conceive his salvation in terms that would make this question sensible. With the help of Ambrose and the Neo-Platonists he had made great strides in firming up the intellectual content of his Christian beliefs¹⁷ – but what good a clear intellectual conscience when the

¹⁶ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1997), pp. 415-416.

¹⁷ Brown’s cautious analysis of the purely intellectual aspects of Augustine’s Christianity around this time stays admirably close to the facts: ‘When Augustine finally approached the priest Simplicianus (perhaps in late July 386), he had already moved imperceptibly towards Catholic Christianity. He was, indeed, an

demons believe¹⁸ and 'men who neither wore themselves out in search of truth, nor meditated for ten years and more on such things, win wings for their readier shoulders'?¹⁹

Augustine had already had his intellectual conversion at the remarkably young age of nineteen. He had now had thirteen years to taste its bitter fruit: for far from taking him out of the earthly city as he had hoped it might, it had worked him deeper into its logic. Through a combination of God's Grace and his own unusual genius, Augustine was now living a life so desolate and dislocated that the historian must struggle to do justice to it in words. Perhaps, then, it is enough to say that having refused all the compromises that make mediocre life so comfortable, Augustine was now living as an exile:²⁰

For if we consider the matter more carefully, we shall see that no one lives as he wishes unless he is happy, and that no one is happy unless he is righteous. Even the righteous man, however, will not live as he wishes unless he arrives at that state where he is wholly free from death, error and harm, and is certain that he will always be free from these things in the future. For this is what our nature desires, and it will not be fully and perfectly happy unless it attains what it desires. What man is there at the present time who can live as he wishes, when living itself is not within his power?... Behold, however, the man who lives as he wishes because he has forced and commanded himself not to desire what he cannot have, but to

enthusiastic convert to "Philosophy"; but this "Philosophy" had already ceased to be an entirely independent Platonism. It had been "fortified", in a highly individual way, by the more somber teachings of S. Paul; and it had come to be identified, on a far deeper level, with "the religion woven into our very bones as children" [*Contra Acad.* II, 2, 5] – that is, with the solid Catholic piety of Monica.' (Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 105).

¹⁸ See above, p. 212.

¹⁹ See above, p. 210.

²⁰ Not, that is, as an exile from the earthly city, but rather as an exile from the Heavenly City. Augustine explains this at *Contra Acad.*, II, 19, 42. Getting this wrong can have unfortunate consequences, as illustrated by J. J. O'Donnell in his article, 'The Inspiration for Augustine's *De civitate Dei*', *AS*, vol. X (1979), pp. 78-79.

choose only what he can have, as Terence says: 'If you cannot do what you want, want what you can do.' Is such a man happy because he is miserable patiently? If he does not love the life he has, it is certainly not a happy life. Moreover, if he does love his life, and is therefore happy, he must necessarily love it more dearly than all other things, since whatever else he loves must be loved for the sake of a happy life. Again, if it is loved as it deserves to be loved – for a man cannot be happy if he does not love his life as he deserves – he who so loves it must necessarily wish it to be eternal. Life, therefore, will only be truly happy when it is eternal.²¹

Here is an example of the kind of confident and unencumbered thinking talked about in Chapter Six. It shows how important were Augustine's unsentimental nature and stark intellectual honesty in the scheme of his salvation: for together they would help to bring him to the point of realising that the Christian Scriptures address themselves to men who have given up all hope of finding happiness in some complex reconciliation with the earthly city. Men of this type – exiles – are distinguished by their perfect hatred of themselves, and also by their corresponding hatred of the citizenship that would have them hate themselves less:

But now, since by reason of certain official positions in human society, it is necessary for us to be both loved and feared by men, the adversary of our true happiness keeps after us, and on every side amidst his snares he scatters the words, 'Well done! Well done!' He does this so that, as we greedily gather up these words, we may be caught unawares, displace our joy from the truth, and place it among the deceits of men, and so that it may afford us pleasure to be feared and to be loved, not because of You but in place of You. In such wise would he possess for himself those who have become like himself, not for a union in charity but for comradeship

²¹ *De civ. Dei*, XIV, 25.

in punishment. This is he who has decreed to put his throne to the north, so that, darkling and cold, such men may serve him who in a perverse and tortured way imitates You.²²

Considerations such as these allow the events in the garden at Milan to be straightforwardly understood. Augustine, who had now been in Milan for two years in his capacity as Imperial Professor of Rhetoric, was renting a villa with his two closest friends in that city: Alypius and Nebridius. These two men were exiles too, and with Augustine they hoped one day to find their true homeland and still the unquiet in their hearts. Outside of their daily duties and cares in the city, the three of them would devote what time they could to the study and discussion of the Christian Scriptures and related subjects:

I went about my accustomed tasks with increasing anxiety, and each day I sighed for You. I frequented Your Church whenever I was free from the burden of the tasks under which I groaned. Alypius was with me, since now, after his third term as assessor, he was relieved of his legal duties... By reason of our friendship, Nebridius had consented to teach under Verecundus...²³

Again it is important to emphasise how Augustine's intellectual conscience had already reached an advanced stage of satisfaction:

Surely "all men are vain in whom there is not the knowledge of God: and who by these good things that are seen could not understand, could not find, Him Who is."

²² *Confess.*, X, 36, 59. Cf. *Serm.*, IX, 9: '[God] doesn't love you as you are, He hates you as you are. That's why He is sorry for you, because He hates you as you are, and wants to make you as you are not yet.' This thinking is presumably the background to Augustine's exegesis of Matthew 7: 3-5, which features in a number of places in his writings. In his exegesis, Augustine associates 'hatred' with a determination not to reprove the discrediting aspects in one's fellow citizen. See Luc M. J. Verheijen, O.S.A., 'The Straw, The Beam, The Tusculan Disputations and The Rule', *AS*, vol. II (1971), pp. 17-37.

²³ *Confess.*, VIII, 6, 13.

I was no longer in that vanity! I had passed beyond it, and by the testimony of the whole creation I had found You our Creator, and Your Word, Who is God with You, and Who is One God with You, through Whom You created all things.²⁴

But what the events in the garden at Milan would address would be something different altogether. For to Augustine, Christianity had ceased to become a matter of understanding and interpreting into the diverse circumstances of life, a saving truth – broadly speaking the approach to salvation that he would have found in all previous pagan wisdom;²⁵ it had become instead the urgent matter of knowing and loving the Saviour.²⁶ This makes it possible for the intellectual historian to conclude that Augustine was experiencing the drama of his situation in political terms. For as he would later define it in the context of his doctrine of the Two Cities, knowing and loving is the first duty of citizenship.²⁷ No matter the clothes a man might try to dress his intentions up in, his love undresses them again and leaves him standing naked on his citizenship: ‘Therefore, not even Catiline himself loved his crimes, but something else, for sake of which he committed them.’²⁸ Indeed, ‘Who was it that gathered the embittered into one society? For all of them there is one same end of temporal and earthly happiness, because of which they do all their deeds, although they waver back and forth amid a countless

²⁴ *Confess.*, VIII, 1, 2.

²⁵ See, for instance, what he has to say at *Serm.*, CXC VII, 1: ‘But because they were given to pride, the proud liar and deceiver intervened, promising them that their souls would be cleansed in some extraordinary manner by pride, and he made demon-worshippers of them. This is the source of all the rites celebrated by the pagans, which, as they say, have the power to cleanse their souls.’

²⁶ Nevertheless, the habit of viewing Augustine’s conversion in terms of belief or faith has largely gone unremarked upon in Augustinian scholarship. See, for instance, Frederick E. Van Fleteren’s presumption that, ‘Augustine’s notion of conversion to Christianity [is] an acceptance of faith.’ Frederick E. Van Fleteren, ‘Authority and Reason, Faith and Understanding’, *AS*, vol. IV (1973), p. 56).

²⁷ See note 1, p. 37 above, for a number of quotations from Augustine’s writings illustrating his mature position on this.

²⁸ *Confess.*, II, 5, 11.

variety of cares.’²⁹ And again, ‘It is for love of this world, after all, that people slave away at their affairs.’³⁰ This piercing political analysis makes Christian salvation a matter of will, a question of each man facing the unique details of his citizenship – the catalogue of compromises and accommodations enacted against the unasked for circumstances of his birth –, and then of his choosing to do without them.³¹

Thus by the burdens of this world I was sweetly weighed down, just as a man often is in sleep. Thoughts wherein I meditated upon You were like the efforts of those who want to arouse themselves but, still overcome by deep drowsiness, sink back again. Just as no man would want to sleep forever, and it is the sane judgment of all men that it is better to be awake, yet a man often defers to shake off sleep when a heavy languor pervades all his members, and although the time to get up has come, he yields to it with pleasure even although it now irks him. In like manner, I was sure that it was better for me to give myself up to Your love than to give in to my own desires. However, although the one way appealed to me and was gaining mastery, the other still afforded me pleasure and kept me victim. I had no answer to give to You when You said to me, ‘Rise, you who sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ will enlighten you.’ When on all sides You showed me that Your words were true, and I was overcome by Your truth, I had no answer whatsoever to make, but only those slow and drowsy words, ‘Right away. Yes, right away.’ ‘Let me be

²⁹ *Ibid.*, XIII, 17, 20.

³⁰ *Serm.*, IX, 13.

³¹ See *De div. qq.* 83, LXVI, 1; 2; 5; *Exp. q. p. ep. ad Rom.*, XXIV, 3; XXVIII, 2; XXIX, 2; XXXII, 1; *De div. qq. ad Simpl.*, I, 1, 15; 17. See also Baynes’ observation that, ‘...just because Augustine himself had experienced what it was to be unable to *will* the right, *will* is the paramount factor in human life. The last word is not with the *mind*, but with the emotions – with what one *loves*.’ (Baynes, *The Political Ideas of St. Augustine’s De civitate Dei*, p. 16).

for a little while.' But 'Right away – right away' was never right now, and 'Let me be for a little while' stretched out for a long time.³²

It is, then, by reason of its political nature that Christian salvation is open to all men, regardless of their capacity to understand its purely intellectual content.³³ For if every man has willfully constructed his citizenship of the earthly city (albeit upon unasked for foundations), then it is open to him also to deconstruct it, brick by brick; though if he goes about this honestly under his own power, he will find that he is not able to deconstruct the foundations upon which it is built. This is because these foundations were not put down by him, but by Adam in Paradise. They represent the price that only one Man could pay on the Cross.³⁴

During another afternoon at the villa, while Augustine was 'twisting and turning in his chain',³⁵ a high ranking African called Ponticianus arrived.³⁶ Alypius was with Augustine but Nebridius was away on some business. Ponticianus was already a Christian and had come to converse with Augustine and his friends. Happening to see a book lying on a gaming table,

³² *Confess.*, VIII, 5, 12. This intuitive metaphor was used by Augustine on a number of occasions. See *Contra Acad.*, I, I, 3; *De b. vita*, 35; *Solil.*, I, 2. It seems that Augustine learnt it from the Bible. See 1 Cor. 15: 34; 1 Thess. 5: 6; 1 Pet. 5: 8.

³³ See also Augustine's remarks at *Confess.*, VI, 5, 8: 'Thus [Scripture] can receive all men into its generous bosom, and by narrow passages lead on to You a small number of them, although these are more numerous than if it did not stand out with such lofty authority and if it had not attracted throngs into the bosom of its holy humility.'

³⁴ See *De civ. Dei*, XII, 30: 'Nothing will bring more joy to [the Heavenly City] than this song of the glory of the Grace of Christ, by Whose blood we are redeemed.'

³⁵ This expression is Augustine's. See *Confess.*, VIII, 11, 25: 'I twisted and turned in my chain...'

³⁶ Nothing is known about this man other than the information which Augustine gives in his *Confessiones*: '...a countryman of ours, in so far as being from Africa, who held high office at court.' (*Confess.*, VIII, 6, 14).

He took it up, opened it, and much to his surprise found that it was by the Apostle Paul. He had thought that it was one or another of the books that I was wearing myself out in teaching... When I told him how I expended very great pains upon those Scriptures, a discussion arose in which he narrated the story of Anthony, an Egyptian monk... From this subject his discourse turned to the flocks within the monasteries and to their way of life... Then it came about that he told us how he and three of his associates... one afternoon, when the Emperor was attending the games at the circus, went out for a walk along the walls. As they chanced to walk in pairs, one went apart with him and the other two wandered off by themselves. While wandering about, these two others came upon a certain house... and there they found a little book in which was written the life of Anthony... One of them began to read this book, to marvel at it, and to be aroused by it... Then the reader, suddenly filled with holy love and by sober shame made angry with himself, turned his eyes upon his friend and said, 'Tell me, I ask you, where will we get by all these labours of ours? What are we seeking for? To what purpose do we serve in office? What higher ambition can we have at court than to become friends of the Emperor? In such a position, what is there that is not fragile and full of peril? When will we get there? But to become God's friend, if I wish it, see, I become one here and now.' He spoke these words, and in anguish during this birth of a new life, he turned his eyes again upon those pages. He read on and was changed within himself.³⁷

As Ponticianus narrated this story, it became impossible for Augustine not to refer it to his own drowsing attitude: 'You took me from behind my own back, where I had placed

³⁷ *Confess.*, VIII, 6, 14.

myself because I did not wish to look upon myself. You stood me face to face with myself, so that I might see how foul I was...'³⁸

Then, during that great struggle in my inner house, which I had violently raised up against my own soul in our chamber [in other words, the citizenship that he had constructed], in my heart... I turn[ed] upon Alypius and cry[ed] out to him: 'What is the trouble with us?... The unlearned rise up and take Heaven by storm, and we, with all our erudition but empty of heart, see how we wallow in flesh and blood.'³⁹

Augustine was now in the most political place that it is possible to imagine: standing on one citizenship, looking out at another:

Suffering from a most fearful wound, I quaked in spirit, angered by a most turbulent anger, because I did not enter into Your Will and into a covenant with You, my God. For all my bones cried out to me to enter into that covenant, and by their praises they lifted me up to the skies. Not by ships or chariots, or on foot do we enter therein; we need not go even so far as I had gone from the house to the place where we were sitting [into the garden]. For not only to go, but even to go in thither was naught else but the will to go, to will firmly and finally, and not to turn and toss, now here, now there, a struggling, half-maimed will, with one part rising upwards and another falling down.⁴⁰

At this juncture it is natural to ask what exactly is it about this supreme act of willing that makes it so unconscionable? To Augustine it was evidently the fact that it

³⁸ *Confess.*, VIII, 7, 16.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, VIII, 8, 19. It is difficult not to think of these lines from A. E. Housman when hearing Augustine speak like this: 'The stars have not dealt me the worst that they could do: / My pleasures are plenty, my troubles are two. / But oh, my two troubles they reave me of rest, / The brains in my head and the heart in my breast. // Oh grant me the ease that is granted so free, / The birthright of multitudes, give it to me, / That relish their victuals and rest on their bed / With flint in their bosoms and guts in their head.' (Ricks (ed.), *A. E. Housman: Collected Poems and Selected Prose*, p. 216.

⁴⁰ *Confess.*, VIII, 8, 19.

involves a man in giving up the private morality of his previous existence: that pattern of living which is citizenship, life and vindication: that habit-hardened reaction against the tragic irony of the earthly city: '...when eternity above delights us and the pleasure found in temporal goods holds us fast from below, it is the same soul that wills this course or that, but not with its whole will. Therefore it is rent asunder by grievous hurt as long as it prefers the first because of its truth but does not put away the other because of habit.'⁴¹ To ask a man to give up the rationale of his existence in this way, is plainly to ask him to die; or from another perspective, it is to ask him to remove everything from his life that has hitherto made it worth living:

My lovers of old, trifles of trifles and vanities of vanities, held me back. They plucked at my fleshly garment, and they whispered softly: 'Do you cast us off?' and 'From that moment we shall no more be with you forever and ever!' and again, 'From that moment no longer will this thing and that be allowed to you, forever and ever!'... But now by far less than half did I hear them... Yet they did delay me, for I hesitated to tear myself away, and shake myself free of them, and leap over to that place where I was called to be. For an overpowering habit kept saying to me, 'Do you think that you can live without them?'⁴²

Finally, with the help of God's Grace, the decision was made. Augustine willed to die to the earthly city. Facing who he was, his heart broke and the deception was over: '...with most bitter contrition I wept within my heart...'⁴³ The real Augustine faced the real God and chose the death and uncertainty of knowing God's judgment in the actual

⁴¹ *Confess.*, VIII, 10, 24.

⁴² *Ibid.*, VIII, 11, 26.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, VIII, 12, 29.

present. Out of the utopian history of his fallen hopes and certainties, Augustine stepped into the salvation history of God's Will for his life. It was a step of metaphysical significance: a step back into the superior knowledge that Adam had given up all those years ago in the Garden of Eden. And this is what God had to say to Augustine:

And lo I heard from a nearby house, a voice like that of a boy or a girl, I know not which, chanting and repeating over and over, 'Take up and read. Take up and read.' Instantly, with altered countenance, I began to think most intently whether children made use of any such chant in some kind of game, but I could not recall hearing it anywhere. I checked the flow of my tears and got up, for I interpreted this solely as a command given to me by God to open the book and read the first chapter I should come upon... So I hurried back to the spot where Alypius was sitting, for I had put there the volume of the Apostle when I got up and left him. I snatched it up, opened it, and read in silence [a highly unusual thing to do in Augustine's day. So unusual, in fact, that this and the description which Augustine gives of Ambrose reading silently at *Confess.*, VI, 3, 3 are the only such records in the literature of antiquity] the chapter on which my eyes first fell: 'Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in strife and envying; but put you on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences.' No further wished I to read, nor was there need to do so. Instantly, in truth, at the end of this sentence, as if before a peaceful light streaming into my heart, all the dark shadows of doubt fled away.⁴⁴

(d) *'Un punto di arrivo e un punto di partenza'*

⁴⁴ *Confess.*, VIII, 12, 29.

'A point of arrival and a point of departure' – these were the words chosen by Agostino Trapè to describe the broader significance of the events in the garden at Milan.⁴⁵ They mark an important note of caution. As with Augustine's intellectual conversion at the age of nineteen, it is important too that this conversion is understood in terms of what it was not. Augustine's own mature view was that, 'This was the sum of it: not to will what I willed and to will what You willed.'⁴⁶ And as he would go on to elaborate,

Out of what deep and hidden pit was [my will] called forth in a single moment, wherein to bend my neck to Your mild yoke and my shoulders to Your light burden, O Christ Jesus, 'my helper and my redeemer?'... Now was my mind free from the gnawing cares of favour-seeking, of striving for gain, of wallowing in the mire, and of scratching lust's itchy sore. I spoke like a child to You, my light, my wealth, my salvation, my Lord God.⁴⁷

Through an act of will, Augustine had committed himself to putting off the old man and putting on the new; he had experienced the indescribable relief of going through death and coming out resurrected with a new heart turned towards God; but now he would have to learn continuously to wait upon God's Will in the actual present of his life if he was to persist in the unfolding of salvation history: 'What cries did I send up to You, my God, when I read the psalms of David, those canticles of faith, those songs of devotion, which exclude a boastful mind, I who was but an uncouth beginner in Your faithful love...'⁴⁸ This would effectively mean learning to die and be resurrected continuously in the actual present of his life; for the true significance of the events in the

⁴⁵ Trapè, *Agostino: l'uomo, il pastore, il mistico*, p. 128.

⁴⁶ *Confess.*, IX, 1, 1.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, IX, 4, 8.

garden at Milan was that they represented the first in a series of acts of will – the first in a series of deaths and resurrections – that if continued to the end of Augustine's days on earth, would see him safe to the Heavenly Jerusalem:

Just as the Egyptians pursue the Jews as far as the sea, so Christians are pursued by their sins as far as baptism. Observe, brothers, and see; through the sea the Jews are liberated, in the sea the Egyptians are overwhelmed. Through baptism Christians are liberated and quit of their sins, while their sins are destroyed. Those ones come out after the Red Sea and journey through the desert; so too Christians after baptism are not yet in the promised land, but live in hope. This age is the desert, and desert indeed it is for Christians after baptism, if they understand what they have received. If it is not merely bodily gestures that have been performed over them but there is also a spiritual effect in their hearts, they will understand that for them this world is a desert, they will understand that they are living as wandering exiles, longing for their native land. All the time they are longing for it, though, they are living in hope... For trials and temptations occur, you know. Just as trials and temptations occur in the desert, so they occur after baptism. The Egyptians who chased the Jews out of Egypt were not their only enemies – they are the old enemy, just as we are all chased by our old life and our old sins under their high chief the devil. Other enemies too cropped up in the desert who wanted to block the road, and battle was joined with them and they were beaten. So too after baptism, when Christians begin to walk along the road of their hearts in hope of the promises of God, they must not deviate. Temptations occur, you see, suggesting something else – the delights of this world, another kind of life – in order to deflect you from the road and turn you aside from your purpose. If you overcome these

desires, these suggestions, the enemy is beaten on the road and the people are led to their native land.⁴⁹

(e) Grace and Confession in the Pilgrim City

As the great Roman jurist Ulpian once observed, 'Nothing is so natural as that an agreement should be dissolved by the same method as that by which it was made.'⁵⁰ In this grave logic lies the explanation of Augustine's understanding of his citizenship of the Pilgrim City. Citizenship is an agreement conferring rights and obligations on the citizen and the City. In the case of the earthly city, it is an agreement that the citizen will be obliged not to challenge its creed and logic of self-deception and re-description in exchange for the right not to be similarly challenged in return. By this pact, the sins of the fathers become the justice of the sons: 'As the Lord on high says, "Every one who doeth sin is the servant of sin." [John 8: 34] Thus, while many godly persons are the slaves of unrighteous masters, the masters whom they serve are themselves not free men; "for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage"[2 Pet. 2: 19].'⁵¹ This predicament means that the aspirations, expectations and certainties of the earthly city are always badly out of alignment with the reality of its achievements:

Indeed, even robbers wish to have peace with their fellows, if only in order to invade the peace of others with greater force and safety. One robber may, of course, be so unsurpassed in strength, and so suspicious of others, that he does not trust any accomplice, but plots his crimes and commits his robberies and murders on his own. Even he, however, maintains some shadow of peace, at least with those

⁴⁹ *Serm.*, IV, 9; tr. Edmund Hill, O.P.

⁵⁰ *Dig.*, I, 17, 35.

⁵¹ *De civ. Dei*, XIX, 15.

whom he cannot kill, and from whom he wishes to conceal his deeds. Also, he is at pains to ensure peace in his own household, with his wife and children and whomever else he has there. Without doubt he takes delight in their obedience to his nod, and if this does not happen, he is angry. He rebukes and punishes; and if necessary, he employs harsh measures to impose upon his household a peace which, he believes, cannot exist unless all the other members of the same domestic society are subject to one head; and this head, in his own house, is himself. Thus, if he were offered the servitude of a larger number – of a city, or of a nation – who would serve him in just the same way as he had required his household to serve him, then he would no longer lurk like a robber in his lair; he would raise himself up as a king for all to see. But the same greed and malice would remain in him.⁵²

From this it seems that what the earthly city is content to describe as justice is not really justice at all; and the same holds for peace and all the other virtues which it appropriates to itself. That it can misuse such elevating language in the first place is the result of God's great Mercy in allowing the laws of nature to be written into men's hearts. Thus, the earthly city, '...has made for itself such false gods as it wished, from whatever source it chose – even creating them out of men – in order to serve them with sacrifices. But the other, the Heavenly, a pilgrim in this world, does not make false gods. Rather, that city is itself made by the true God, and is itself to be His true sacrifice.'⁵³ Augustine seems to have thought that this process of re-description lay behind a great deal of human endeavour; and that everywhere it was encountered it betrayed the agreement made between the earthly city and its citizens – the agreement not to confess and be undone by the manifest truth in and around them:

⁵² *De civ. Dei*, XIX, 12.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, XVIII, 54. Cf. quotation on pp. 81-82 above.

The sea, for instance, is a true thing; but Neptune stands for a lie fabricated by man, for here the truth of God is twisted into a lie. To be sure, God made the sea, whereas man made the image of Neptune. Similarly, God made the sun; man, however, by making an image of the sun, perverts God's truth into a lie. But, lest they say, 'I do not worship the image, but it is the sun I worship,' for this reason it was stated that they worshiped the creature rather than the Creator.⁵⁴

In Paradise, Adam possessed the One True God; he also possessed true Justice, Peace, Freedom and Wisdom; and in the unquestioning character of his innocence he could not logically have altered this blessed trajectory. For as he looked to God for all his seeing, he was effectively of one mind with Him in everything that he did.⁵⁵ With no reason to look either side of the actual present of God's spoken Will, he effectively had no criterion of truth: for his understanding was unqualified: he had not yet experienced that movement of mind whereby men proclaim their intention to become their own source of truth. But his was a fragile state: for its glory was freedom, freedom of will; and its (metaphysical) expression was eternity. This is, naturally, a counterintuitive mode of being to understand, and correspondingly difficult for the historian to describe. Augustine himself made no attempt to capture it in a single, precise definition;⁵⁶ however, there seems little reason to suppose that he would not have endorsed C. S. Lewis' effort:

⁵⁴ *Serm.*, CXCVII, 1.

⁵⁵ See *Confess.*, XIII, 31, 46: 'When men see these things through Your spirit, You see in them. Therefore, when they see that they are good, You see that they are good, and whatsoever things are pleasing because of You, in them You Yourself are pleasing, and such things as are pleasing to us because of Your Spirit are in us pleasing to You.'

⁵⁶ It is, after all, the subject of the formidable petition that ends the *Confessiones*: 'What man will give it to a man to understand this? What angel will give it to an angel? What angel to a man? From You let it be asked. In You let it be sought. At Your door let us knock for it.' (*Confess.*, XIII, 38, 53).

Time is the very lens through which ye see – small and clear, as men see through the wrong end of a telescope – something that would otherwise be too big for ye to see at all. That thing is Freedom: the gift whereby ye most resemble your Maker and are yourselves parts of eternal reality. But ye can see it only through the lens of Time, in a little clear picture, through the inverted telescope. It is a picture of moments following one another and yourself in each moment making some choice that might have been otherwise. Neither the temporal succession nor the phantom of what ye might have chosen and didn't is itself Freedom. They are a lens. The picture is a symbol: but it's truer than any philosophical theorem (or, perhaps, than any mystic's vision) that claims to go beyond it. For every attempt to see the shape of eternity except through the lens of Time destroys your knowledge of Freedom.⁵⁷

It is in this sense that time, as a lens, reveals the sordid utilitarianism of fallen human thought. When Adam turned away from God it was on the initiative of four simple words: 'Did God really say?'⁵⁸ That this part of the Creation Narrative makes Adam's innocence out to be an absurdly perilous thing is somewhat inevitable. However, as Augustine would have pointed out, this is really the effect of reading it from the perspective of an already fallen world: for had these four words not been spoken to Adam, he would not logically have encountered them in his own mind. He would not logically have encountered them in his own mind because to do so would have meant calling God's judgment into question with no good reason for doing so. As such, by qualifying the third person singular of the verb 'to say' with the adverb 'really', the serpent effectively taught Adam the lesson of life apart from God. This lesson – that

⁵⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (London, HarperCollins, 2002), pp. 140-141. The persistent use of 'ye' is a reference to the fact that it is the Scotch George MacDonald who is meant to be speaking.

⁵⁸ Gen. 3: 1.

sensible, broad-minded men should always reach for an independence of perspective *vis-à-vis* God – has been embodied in all the criteria of truth that the sons of Adam have produced; but none more so, it would seem, than in the philosophical criterion of truth, which is studied as part of the intellectual history of the West.⁵⁹ This, at any rate, was what Augustine seems to have thought:

...with a mighty voice You speak to Your servant in his interior ear, and break through my deafness, and cry out: 'O man, true it is that what my Scripture says I myself say. Yet that Scripture speaks in time, but time does not affect my Word, because that Word exists along with me in equal eternity. So the things that you see through my Spirit I see, just as those things which you speak by my Spirit I say. So also it is that when you see those things in time, I do not see them in time, even as when you say those things in time, I do not say them in time.'⁶⁰

When a son of Adam is initiated into the citizenship of the earthly city, he effectively agrees to pay the price of his father's original transgression in a continuing commitment to serve, in thought and word and deed, the sordid utility of life apart from God.⁶¹ This is evidently why Augustine thought that time was the best idiom in which to describe the resultant mode of being. For only time, with its connotation of intervals running endlessly from an unknown future into an untouchable past, can adequately

⁵⁹ Indeed as Augustine would reflect in his *Confessiones*, it was just this advanced criterion of truth that enabled him to identify himself as an exile by the unquiet in his heart. See *Confess.*, VII, 20, 26; especially, 'It is for this reason, I believe that You wished me to come upon those books [of the Neo-Platonists] before I read Your Scriptures, so that the way I was affected by them might be stamped upon my memory.' Cf. n. 56, p. 23 above for the thoughts of Pope Benedict XVI on this subject.

⁶⁰ *Confess.*, XIII, 29, 44.

⁶¹ As Augustine says with reference to his own son, Adeodatus: '...born of me in the flesh out of my sin, well had You made him: he was almost fifteen years old, and in power of mind he surpassed many grave and learned men. O Lord my God, Creator of all things and most powerful to reform our deformities, to You do I confess Your gifts. For in that boy I owned nothing but the sin. That he was bought up by us in Your discipline, to that You and none other inspired us. Your gifts I confess to You.' (*Confess.*, IX, 6, 14).

describe the magnitude of the responsibility that fallen men take on – really no less than the responsibility for recreating the eternity which Adam lost. But then as C. S. Lewis helps to make clear, eternity is not something that can be engineered. It cannot be engineered because it is the freedom of choosing to obey God's Will: The Perfect Law of Liberty.⁶² To try to understand eternity from the point of view of time is indeed a little like trying to understand liberty from the point of view of law. On the one hand, the necessity of law brings men to a useful awareness and appreciation of freedom; but on the other hand, it naturally inclines them to believe that they can engineer freedom for themselves from the materials that they find in and around them. This issues in a paradox which all political theorists are familiar with. To once again quote Pascal: 'It is odd, when one thinks of it, that there are people in the world who, having renounced all the laws of God and nature, have themselves made laws which they rigorously obey...'⁶³ Law, like time, is a lens through which men see something which would otherwise be too big for them to see at all. That thing is freedom; but every attempt to see, or indeed to engineer, freedom outside of law destroys their knowledge of it. Hence Pascal's puzzlement: for just as time is a condition of life in a fallen world, so is law; and thus it is neither fair nor logical for men to imagine that either can furnish the basis for an independent analysis of such subjects as eternity and freedom, and also justice and happiness and enlightenment and so on.⁶⁴

⁶² See above, p. 107.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ What is it that distinguishes these complicated but familiar subjects of thought as a class? Isaiah Berlin gives what is probably the only sensible answer: that they are distinguished by the type of answer they traditionally receive in the academic literature: 'What, therefore, is characteristic of specifically philosophical questions is that they do not (and some of them perhaps never will) satisfy conditions required by an independent science, the principal among which is that the path to their solution must be implicit in their very formulation.' (Sir Isaiah Berlin, 'Does Political Theory Still Exist?', in Peter Laslett &

Bearing these considerations in mind, it is perhaps inevitable that the citizens of the earthly city are quick to silence those who dare to point out the more obvious philosophical difficulties in attempting to make the conditions of life in a fallen world its renovation and renewal too:⁶⁵ 'It is not enough that these unhappy men are sick. They even exult in their sickness, and they blush to take the medicine which could heal them. By doing this, they are not healed; rather, they fall into a still more grievous affliction.'⁶⁶

This desire of earthly citizens to 'exult in their sickness' would have been made easier had God not gifted them the natural laws in their hearts.⁶⁷ As it is, these combine to form their conscience, shaming them into seeing first in the context of their own lives, and then in the wider context of human society, the manifest insufficiencies of the horizontal, engineered concept of eternity.⁶⁸ And it is apparently in virtue of this fact that Augustine thinks that the twin devices of Grace and Confession represent the one logical route out of the citizenship of the earthly city. On the one hand, Grace represents each fallen man's inability to pay in his own person the wages of death: 'Now we bear the image of the earthly man by the propagation of sin and death which passes into us through our birth; but we bear the image of the heavenly man by the grace of pardon and

W. G. Runciman (eds.), *Philosophy, Politics and Society* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1972), pp. 5-6). Berlin's association of 'independence' with 'science' is significant given the context of the discussion here.

⁶⁵ This phrase has already been used in a similar context. See above, pp. 46-47

⁶⁶ *De civ. Dei*, X, 29.

⁶⁷ See above, pp. 207-208, for an example: Augustine's famous prayer for 'chastity, but not yet'.

⁶⁸ See above, pp. 132-135; and in particular, Augustine's exhortation to his longtime patron, Romanianus, preserved in the dedication of the dialogue *Contra Academicos*: 'That part of you, then, because of which you have ever sought after what was honourable and good... that Divine element, I say, which has somehow been lulled to sleep in you by the drowsy lethargy of this life, providence, working in secret, has decided to rouse by means of the several harsh buffetings which you have suffered. Wake up! wake up! I beg you.' (*Contra Acad.*, I, 3).

life everlasting bestowed upon us only by regeneration through the Man Jesus Christ, the Mediator between God and men.'⁶⁹ And on the other hand, Confession represents each fallen man's responsibility to own before the judgment of God, the private morality that he has constructed on the compromised foundations of his birth:

In a remarkable way, therefore, there is in humility something which exalts the mind, and something in exaltation which abases it. It may indeed seem paradoxical to say that exaltation abases and humility exalts. Godly humility, however, makes the mind subject to what is superior to it. But nothing is superior to God; and that is why humility exalts the mind by making it subject to God. Exaltation, on the other hand, is a vice; and for that very reason it spurns subjection, and so falls away from Him Who has no superior... This is why humility is most highly praised in the City of God and commended to the City of God during its pilgrimage in this world; and it is especially exemplified in that City's King, Who is Christ. We are also taught by the Holy Scriptures that the vice of exaltation, the opposite of this virtue, holds complete sway over Christ's adversary, the devil. Certainly, this is the great difference that distinguishes the two cities of which we are speaking. The one is a fellowship of godly men, and the other of the ungodly; and each has its own angels belonging to it. In the one city, love of God has been given pride of place, and, in the other, love of self.⁷⁰

So far as the earthly city is concerned, then, it seems fair to conclude that for Augustine, only Grace and Confession could have satisfied Ulpian's requirement.

⁶⁹ *De civ. Dei*, XIII, 23.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, XIV, 13.

(f) The political significance of Augustine's Creation Narratives

If, following Trapè, the events in the garden at Milan represented a point of arrival *and* departure for Augustine, what sort of shape exactly would his New life begin to take on?

In his *Confessiones*, Augustine makes it clear that his only initial concern was to complete a withdrawal from public life and its trappings: 'When the vintage vacation was ended, I sent word to the citizens of Milan that they should arrange for another seller of words for their students. This was both because I had chosen to serve You and because I was no longer equal to that profession by reason of difficulties in breathing and the pain in my chest.'⁷¹ Once again, it is imperative to point out that Augustine was on a trajectory set by an act of will: in all important essentials, his Christianity consisted in a straightforward commitment to a life lived in obedience to God's Will. An example of what this might mean practically to him at the time was his response to Monica's death at Ostia, in 387 A.D., just a short while after his baptism by Ambrose at Milan.⁷² This was naturally a shocking event for Augustine, not least because of its timing; but unfortunately, it seems that he chose initially to take it to himself rather than refer it to God: 'I closed her eyes and a mighty sorrow welled up from the depths of my heart and overflowed into tears. At the same time, by a powerful command of my mind, my eyes drank up their source until it was dry.'⁷³ This embarrassment at the force of his feelings, strange as it must seem to a modern in the West, was evidently motivated by the strong

⁷¹ *Confess.*, IX, 5, 13. Brown speculates that this pain could have been some psychosomatic illness, the physical manifestation of a nervous breakdown, perhaps. It will never be possible to know. At any rate, Augustine recovered from this illness and never suffered from it again during a lifetime of intense literary and oratorical activity. See Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, pp. 109-110, for a short discussion with references.

⁷² See *Confess.*, IX, 6, 14: 'We [he means himself, Adeodatus and Alypius] were baptized [during the night of April 24-25th, 387 A.D.], and anxiety over our past life fled away from us.'

⁷³ *Confess.*, IX, 12, 29.

Neo-Platonic element in his outlook. However, Augustine should really have known better than to try to make his own sense of this event. Consequently, he suffered what he called a 'twofold sadness': 'Because it distressed me greatly that these human feelings had such sway over me, for this needs be according to the due order and our allotted state, I sorrowed over my sorrow with an added sorrow, and I was torn by a twofold sadness.'⁷⁴ Everyone else in the grieving party was naturally confused by Augustine's driven reaction: 'At the same time, in that part of the house where I could do so, I discussed a subject suitable to such a time with those who thought I should not be left alone. By so true a salve I soothed a torment known to me alone. The others knew nothing of it; they listened attentively to me, and they thought that I was free from all sense of sorrow.'⁷⁵ Even as Monica's body was being buried and afterwards, Augustine continued to withhold the truth of his heart from God – the truth that puts the events in the garden at Milan in clear perspective as a beginning: that is, as merely the first but decisive step against the habit of a lifetime. As he writes, '...with a troubled mind I besought You as best I could to heal my anguish. You did not do so, and it was, I think, to impress upon my memory by this one lesson how strong is the bond of any habit, even upon a mind that no longer feeds upon deceptive words [Augustine is here referring to the Manichees]'.⁷⁶

This anguish of Augustine at his apparent powerlessness in the face of natural passions – passions that threatened to rush in and wreck his happy tranquility of mind – is apt to strike the historian as familiar. For there are clear echoes of the unhappy

⁷⁴ *Confess.*, IX, 12, 31.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, IX, 12, 32.

experiences of his adolescence, and most especially of how he chose to deal with those experiences. As a sixteen year old he had found it expedient to heap a disproportionate blame on his parents for his moral failings; then as a young man he had found in the Manichaean ontology a ready route out of all personal responsibility for evil; now here was God telling him in no uncertain terms that the New Augustine must never again give in to this old habit:⁷⁷ that in fact he must develop a new habit of speaking the truth of his heart to God, however reproving that truth might seem: 'Nor do I say any good thing to men except what You have first heard from me; nor do You hear any such thing from me but what You have first spoken to me.'⁷⁸ Augustine seems to have thought that had he simply said to God what he really felt at the time – 'Why is it that I have this horror of emotions beyond my control?' – God would immediately have addressed this, the truth of his heart. But by taking it to himself instead of exposing it to God's judgment in confession, he succeeded only in re-describing it for the benefit of his pride. This was evidently an important and shocking lesson for the new pilgrim to learn, for once he had faced and gone through with the death of confessing this truth to God, a new kind of relief, or resurrection, swept over him:

Little by little, I regained my former thoughts about Your handmaid, about the devout life she led in You, about her sweet and holy care for us, of which I was so suddenly deprived. I took comfort in weeping in Your sight over her and for her, over myself and for myself. I gave way to the tears that I had held back, so that

⁷⁷ There is here a deliberate intention to be vague, for however tempting, the historian must never outreach his facts. In this case, the facts do not support any firm conclusion on the deep seated reason for Augustine's horror of the mind's inability to control large aspects of human behaviour – the cause in relation to which his unsentimental nature and stark intellectual honesty stand as effects. Indeed this historian believes that such things are not the proper subject of scholarly enquiry; that they hold between a man and God, and should never be made more public than they need to be. Doubtless Augustine knew the reason for this aspect of his character and could have revealed it in his *Confessiones* had he wished.

⁷⁸ *Confess.*, X, 2, 2.

they poured forth as much as they wished. I spread them beneath my heart, and it rested upon them, for at my heart were placed Your ears, not the ears of a mere man, who would interpret with scorn my weeping.⁷⁹

It is by such deaths and resurrections as these, repeated over and over in the actual present because the lightness of God's burden is perfect obedience, that the Pilgrim City advances on its course of salvation history: 'But because you turn a blind eye to the interior battle and take pleasure in exterior battles, it means you don't want to belong to the new song, in which it says, "Who trains my hands for battle, and my fingers for war" [Ps. 144: 1]. There is a war a man wages with himself, engaging evil desires, curbing avarice, crushing pride, stifling ambition, slaughtering lust. You fight these battles in secret, and you don't lose them in public!'⁸⁰

Monica's death came after an important period spent in philosophical retreat at Cassiciacum (roughly from September 386 A.D. to March 387 A.D.). Augustine had traveled to this beautiful place (the modern town of Cassago Brianza, about 30km Northeast of Milan in the province of Lecco) out of a, '...desire for liberty and leisure in which to sing to You out of my very marrow: "My heart has said to You: I have sought Your Face: Your Face, O Lord, will I require." [Ps. 26: 8]'⁸¹

The day came when I was actually set free from teaching rhetoric... I started out for that country place. As to what I did there by way of literary work, which was already in Your service, although during this period as it were of rest it still

⁷⁹ *Confess.*, IX, 12, 33.

⁸⁰ *Serm.*, IX, 13.

⁸¹ *Confess.*, IX, 3, 6.

breathed forth the school of pride, my books bear witness, both the ones that resulted from discussion with those present there and the ones made by myself alone before You.⁸²

Those 'present there' were, from his immediate family, Monica, Adeodatus and Navigius; then his cousins, Rusticus and Lastidianus; and finally, his great friend Alypius and two other students, the boys Trygetius and Licentius. Brown dryly observes how they made an unlikely band of intellectual discoverers!: 'Taken all together, however, Augustine had gathered together an ill-assorted company for a life of philosophical *otium*: a pious old woman, two uneducated cousins, and two private pupils, aged about sixteen.'⁸³ To attempt such a retreat on the model of the classical *otium* was probably the only sensible way for Augustine to fill his time before baptism the following Easter. Having made such a spectacular retreat from public life, it would have been essential for him to remove himself from Milan for a little while at least (while the prominent fathers of the sons he would have taught licked their wounds); and otherwise the ideal of a cultured retirement to the serious but leisurely pursuit of wisdom was always going to strike Augustine as a suitable pattern for his new commitment to becoming a new creation. As Brown points out, '...looking back upon this period of his life, Augustine could speak of it as a time of *Christianae vitae otium*, a 'Christian otium' [*Retr.*, I, 1, 1]. This ideal was to form the background of Augustine's life from that time until his ordination as a priest, in 391 A.D.'⁸⁴

⁸² *Confess.*, IX, 4, 7.

⁸³ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, p. 119. Brown does not mention Adeodatus or Alypius, presumably because they were both educated and very much up to the rigours of the enterprise.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

These are the facts that help to bring the so-called Cassiciacum dialogues into proper historical perspective as a catalogue of Augustine's deaths and resurrections during this formative period of his life:

For my memory calls me back, and it becomes sweet to me, O Lord, to confess to You by what inward goads You mastered me, and how You leveled me down by making low the mountains and the hills of my thoughts, how you made straight my crooked paths and smoothed the rough, and how You likewise subdued my heart's brother, Alypius himself, to the name of Your only-begotten, 'our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' For at first he disdained to put that name into our writings, but wished rather to have them smell of those cedars of the schools which the Lord had now broken down, than of those healthful herbs which the Church provides against serpents.⁸⁵

This process of 'leveling', of 'straightening' and of 'smoothing', would effectively complete Augustine's initiation into the citizenship of the Pilgrim City. Practically speaking, it involved working out all the residual traces of the conception of salvation which had held him in bondage for so long: the conception of salvation that had been raised on the myth of his innocence: 'With what fruit, then, O my Lord, to whom my conscience each day makes confession – more secure in its hope of Your mercy than from any innocence of its own – with what fruit, I ask, do I confess, not only in Your presence but to men also by these writings, what I now am, not what I once was?'⁸⁶ The answer as Augustine would come to experience it, would be a gradual realisation that the life of a Pilgrim is no unfolding intellectual program. It is no unfolding intellectual

⁸⁵ *Confess.*, IX, 4, 7.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, X, 3, 4.

program because it is a life lived not in the pursuit of some abstract, conceptual truth, but in perfect obedience to the Will of God. And what makes perfect obedience possible for a fallen man is confession: that is, an ongoing conversation with God about the truth of his heart: for it is only with this truth exposed that a man is disabused of the real motives of his heart, and thus saved from having to re-describe them to himself and those around him:

You judge me, O Lord, for, although no one 'knows the things of a man but the spirit of man which is in him,' [1 Cor. 2: 11] there is something further in man which not even that spirit of man which is in him knows. But You, Lord, Who made him, know all things that are in him... Let me confess, then, what I know about myself. Let me confess also what I do not know about myself, since that too which I know about myself I know because You enlighten me. As to that which I am ignorant of concerning myself, I remain ignorant of it until my 'darkness shall be made as the noonday in Your sight. [Is. 58: 10]⁸⁷

However, perfection such as this comes at the price of exposing the citizenship of the earthly city at its weakest point, which, as has already been explained, is pride:⁸⁸ 'A race eager to know about another man's life, but slothful to correct their own! Why do they seek to hear from me what I am, men who do not want to hear from You what they themselves are?'⁸⁹ This was the same pride that Augustine would seek to expose in his extended critique of Rome's claim to be the moral and political education of mankind; and his method in prosecuting that project would be based firmly in his belief that

⁸⁷ *Confess.*, X, 5, 7.

⁸⁸ See above, pp. 208-209.

⁸⁹ *Confess.*, X, 3, 3.

confident and unencumbered thinking is the precondition to salvation.⁹⁰ Now it can be understood why he thought that such thinking has its enemy in the vested interests of the citizens of the earthly city:

However, through love for such things they become subject to them, and in subjection they cannot pass judgment on them. Nor do things answer those who ask unless they are men of judgment. They do not change their voice, that is, their beauty, when one man merely looks at them and another both looks and questions, so as to appear one thing to this man, another to that. It appears the same to both: it is silent to one, but speaks to the other. Nay rather, it speaks to all, but only those understand who compare its voice taken in from outside with the truth within them.⁹¹

These considerations help to explain why Augustine chose to end his autobiographical book with a literal interpretation of Genesis (this interpretation is the subject of Chapter Thirteen).⁹² Indeed from the point of view of what has been said in

⁹⁰ See above, pp. 157-159.

⁹¹ *Confess.*, X, 6, 10.

⁹² They also help to explain why those sharing O'Donnell's agenda cannot see the sense in it: 'What are the last four books doing there? The latest catalogue of efforts to answer that question is two decades old and books and articles addressing it in one form or another continue to appear. Some of the ideas they propose have merit, but none has been presented in a way to compel, or even very strongly to encourage, assent. One prevailing weakness of many of these efforts has been the assumption that there lies somewhere unnoticed about the *Confessions* a neglected key to unlock all mysteries. But for a text as multilayered and subtle as the *Confessions*, any attempt to find a single key is pointless. Augustine himself says that he meant to stir our souls not test our ingenuity as lock-picks.' (O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, p. xxiii). Cf. note 49, p. 31 above; and also Max Zepf's comment that, '...The entire work is divided into two parts which seem to have nothing whatsoever to do with each other. The Biography of the first ten books is suddenly resolved into a dry exposition of the first three chapters of Genesis. Who has not been compelled to shake his head and ask what purpose Augustine could have had in mind when he thus brought together such various materials?' (Max Zepf, *Augustine's Confessions; Heidelburger Abhandlungen Zur Philosophie und ihrer Geschichte*, hrsg. V. C. Hoffman and H. Rickert, H. Q., 1924, quoted in *The Lutheran Church Quarterly*, vol. XXI, No. 3, July 1948, p. 214. This Quotation from John C. Cooper, 'Why Did Augustine Write Books XI – XIII of the *Confessions*?', *AS*, vol. II (1971), p. 37. Incidentally, Cooper's article is very good. His instinctive privileging of content over structure leads him to conclude that the *Confessiones* are indeed a unity. However, because he views them as a 'spiritual history' (p. 38), a

this chapter, it would have been strange had he not. For to publicly declare that the first three books of Genesis contain a full and accurate diagnosis of the human condition was, in the context of his own life, a most remarkable act of confession. As a young man, he had rejected the Christian Scriptures out of hand as uncouth and impenetrable, but that had been at a time when his expectations about salvation were badly out of alignment with theirs. To use his own description above, 'it speaks to all, but only those understand who compare its voice taken in from outside with the truth within them'. This is evidently what Augustine meant when he said that, '...no Christian doubts that it is with those eyes of the heart that he will see God; for he faithfully accepts what our God and Master says: "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." [Matt. 5: 8]'⁹³ In His great Mercy, God has given it to all men⁹⁴ to be able to discern for themselves the manifest inadequacies in their citizenship of the earthly city;⁹⁵ but if this discernment is to lead to the kind of despair talked about in Chapter Six (especially, p. 159), the kind of despair that is all diagnosis and no cure, then it must be supported by a countenance disabused of the myth of innocence: '...what death would not be preferable if the soul so lived as we see it in a boy newly born? Not to mention the life lived in the womb, which I suppose must be called life.' This quotation comes from the first of Augustine's Cassiciacum dialogues, *Soliloquiorum* (it can be found at II, 20, 36); and a little earlier in the same work, he can be found elaborating on the importance of this for his readers: 'But if the mind does not believe that only thus will it attain vision, it will not seek healing. Even if

kind of 'theological autobiography', he inevitably finds their master key in the theme of a journey towards intellectually satisfying belief (see especially pp. 41-42).

⁹³ *De civ. Dei*, XXII, 29.

⁹⁴ See *Contra Acad.*, I, 1, 4: 'I speak of philosophy from whose breasts no age can complain that it is excluded.'; and II, 1, 9.

⁹⁵ For instance, see *De civ. Dei*, XXII, 22; XIX, 4-8.

it believes that this is true, and that only so will it attain the vision, but at the same time despairs of healing, will it not abandon the quest and refuse to obey the precepts of the Physician?'⁹⁶

(g) Cassiciacum: 'where are your claws and teeth?'

Cassiciacum marks arguably the most difficult period in Augustine's life. In his sniping style, O'Donnell dismisses it as a 'holiday'; and then makes special reference to the fact that Augustine officially announced his resignation as Public Professor of Rhetoric in the form of a letter.⁹⁷ This gratuitous use of an unexceptional fact (one amongst countless tedious examples) is meant to help O'Donnell move his thesis that the central events of Augustine's life can be explained exclusively in terms of cowardice and deception; and that the measure of his influence over the West should correspondingly be his status as one of the earthly city's more outstanding citizens. The tragedy is that O'Donnell's thesis will continue to enjoy a well-calculated success. For every scholar that it will irritate, it will delight a thousand of the unsuspecting public, many of whom will be encountering Augustine for the first time through this most distorting of lenses. Now, where once the course of his life could have prompted them to question theirs, they will simply join in O'Donnell's childish delight at having bested one of the most honest and accessible saints of the West.

However, those prepared not to democratize the facts of this period in Augustine's life encounter a troubling possibility sketched many years ago by Aristotle:

⁹⁶ *Solil.*, II, 4, 12.

⁹⁷ O'Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography*, p. 40.

If there is one person so pre-eminently superior in goodness that there can be no comparison between the goodness and political capacity which he shows and what is shown by the rest, such a person... can no longer be treated as part of a state. Being so greatly superior to others in goodness and political capacity, they will suffer injustice if they are treated as worthy only of an equal share; for a person of this order may very well be like a god among men... There can be no law which runs against men who are utterly superior to others. They are a law in themselves. It would be a folly to attempt to legislate for them: they might reply to such an attempt with the words used by the lions, in the fable of Antisthenes, when the hares were making orations and claiming that all the animals had equal rights, 'Where are your claws and teeth?'⁹⁸

This is really the other, lesser known half of the reasoning behind Aristotle's famous dictum 'He who is without a polis, by reason of his own nature and not of some accident, is either a poor sort of being, or a being higher than man.'⁹⁹ What Aristotle was seeing clearly here was how politics, and all the civic virtues attaching to it, replaces something else – something undeniably better but elusive. That 'something else', so Augustine would say, is vertical eternity – the perfect knowledge of what everyone should be doing in the actual present in order to bring about a complete and meaningful reconciliation of interests. In Chapter One it was pointed out how this makes for an unusual utopia, quite outside the mainstream of developments in the political tradition of the West. That is, neither a monarchy or aristocracy where one man or only a few have access to privileged knowledge, nor a democracy where, for reasons which it is not difficult to imagine, the possibility of privileged knowledge has been discounted altogether, and a virtue made out

⁹⁸ Aristotle (tr. Sir Ernest Barker), *The Politics of Aristotle*, 1284a, pp. 157-8.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 1253a, p. 6.

of this vice. And as there has now also been ample opportunity to show, this is why Augustine thought that politics should only ever be considered a condition of life in this fallen world, not its renovation and renewal. For politics, that is, horizontal eternity, is terrified by the thought of 'claws and teeth': for it knows full well that anything so hard and sharp might tear the veil of its deception, and cause the citizens of the earthly city to be troubled in heart. Perhaps, then, it was this terror that Pontius Pilate's wife was expressing when she said to him: 'Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.'¹⁰⁰ For as Augustine would come to realise during his hard long nights alone, talking to God at Cassiciacum once the day's business of teaching was over, nothing holds up the mirror to fallen human nature like perfect obedience: that vision which the West cannot have and live:

...the bodily eye might say: I shall not love darkness when I can look on the sun. there seems to be a kind of orderliness in that, though in fact there is none. The eye loves darkness because it is not strong, and unless it be strong it cannot see the sun. So the mind is often deceived, thinks itself sound and gives itself airs. Because it cannot yet see, it complains as if it had the right to do so. But the supreme Beauty knows when to show Itself. It performs the function of the Physician, and knows who are whole better than those who are being healed. When we have emerged a little from the darkness we think we see, but cannot imagine or perceive how deeply we had sunk or how far we have progressed. Comparing our condition with graver forms of disease we believe we are healed. Do you remember how, yesterday, in complete assurance, we declared that we are free from disease, that we loved nothing but Wisdom; all else we sought and desired only for the sake of Wisdom? How sordid, how base, how execrable, how horrible the embrace of a

¹⁰⁰ Matt. 27: 19.

woman seemed to you when we were discussing the desire of marriage! But as you lay awake last night and the same question arose, you found it was very different with you than you had supposed. Imagined fondlings and bitter sweetness tickled your fancy, much less than formerly, of course, but far more than you had supposed. In that way the mysterious Physician was teaching you two things; how you can evade His care, and what remains to be cured.¹⁰¹



‘Where are your claws and teeth?’ – this is what the mysterious Physician seems to have been saying to Augustine at Cassiciacum. For Augustine could not yet see, and yet he was complaining as if he had the right to do so. Like the hares in Antisthenes fable, he had been making orations for many years now, claiming equal rights for all men – claiming as Adam had done originally, the right to a paradise apart from God. Indeed Augustine’s time at Cassiciacum would be divided sacramentally between days spent scratching the old but itchy sore of an intellectually engineered salvation in the line of the great schemes of pagan antiquity, and nights spent conversing alone with God.¹⁰² During

¹⁰¹ *Solil.*, I, 14, 25. See also pp. 31-32 above. Augustine would go on to use the image of the Physician often. Cf. *Confess.*, II, 7, 15; IV, 3, 5; *Serm.*, CCXCIV, 11; CCXCIX, 6; XXVII, 1.

¹⁰² Perhaps most emblematic of this ambivalence is the work *De immortalitate animae*, composed in 387 during the period of Augustine’s baptism. See, for instance, John A. Mourant’s comments in his article, ‘Remarks on the *De immortalitate animae*’, *AS*, vol. II (1971), pp. 213-217. Cf. Van Fleteren’s observation that, ‘The optimism with which Augustine views the relationship between Platonism and Christianity is apparent. Both call men to the intelligible world. Augustine, at other times, explicitly identifies the Kingdom of God with the intelligible world [*De ord.*, I, 2, 32]. One of the effects of this identification in the early works is their pressed intellectualism. Christian Salvation is equated with the Neo-Platonic ascent of the soul to the vision of God. Salvation and the acquisition of knowledge are closely allied. These results and their cause Augustine will live to regret [*Retr.*, I, 3, 2]. (Van Fleteren, O.S.A., ‘Authority and Reason,

the day he was learning how to evade the Physician's care; during the night he was being taught what remained to be cured.¹⁰³ This vacillation between an old habit perfected and reflected in all the most absurd aspects of the Manichaeism doctrine – those aspects which 'pervert God's truth into a lie',¹⁰⁴ – and the harsh discipline of being born again a new creation, would issue some years after Cassiciacum in a most remarkable act of public confession. In the course of his *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, Augustine would reveal his claws and teeth to the world. Like Dostoyevsky's hero Raskolnikoff, he would get down on his hands and knees in public and perform the most political act that it is possible for a man to perform: the confession of his sin. To Augustine and men like him, Manichaeism had offered a way of continuing to live in a manifestly fallen world; and just how their hearts desired to live rather than die is reflected in every unlikely and desperate claim in the Manichaean literature:

If, at some time, they could be turned towards God by the flaming swords, that is, by temporal trials, knowing their sins and groaning for them, and not also blaming them on some external nature that does not exist, but on themselves entirely, just as they deserve to; and loving God by charity (which is the completion of science) – God Who is above all else incommunicable; and what is more, loving Him with the whole of their heart, with the whole of their soul and with the whole of their mind, and loving their neighbour as themselves: if they do all of these things they will surely arrive at the Tree of Life, and live in Eternity.¹⁰⁵

Faith and Understanding', p. 45). This ambivalence between 'day and night' is a probable reason for the puzzling absence of any mention of St. Paul in the Cassiciacum dialogues. That he had been read by this stage is a fact attested to by Augustine in his *Confessiones* (see p. 238 above).

¹⁰³ Those like O'Donnell who, in a democratic spirit, focus only on Augustine's daytime activities are bound to regard this time at Cassiciacum as a 'holiday'.

¹⁰⁴ See p. 237 above.

¹⁰⁵ *De Gen. c. Man.*, II, 27, 41.

Yet writing at that time, just a year before his forced ordination as priest in the town of Hippo Regius and the transformation of his life out of all recognition, Augustine still,

...did not know that a new life is not given for nothing; that it has to be paid dearly for, and only acquired by much patience and suffering, and great future efforts. But now a new history commences: a story of the gradual renewing of a man, of his slow progressive regeneration, and change from one world to another – an introduction to the hitherto unknown realities of life. This may well form the theme of a new tale; the one we wish to offer the reader is ended.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, p. 434.

CONCLUSIONS: THE PILGRIM CITY

In the Introduction and Chapter One, attention was drawn to the manner in which Augustine consistently avoids the philosophical difficulties traditionally associated with the Western conception of political justice. These difficulties have been the characteristic feature of political thought in the West since its beginnings in Classical Greece, in the sixth-century B.C; and insofar as they involve questions about wisdom, law and human destiny, they are fairly summed up in Erich Fromm's phrase, 'the fear of freedom':

One particularly telling representation of the fundamental relation between man and freedom is offered in the Biblical myth of man's expulsion from Paradise. The myth identifies the beginning of human history with an act of choice, but it puts all emphasis on the sinfulness of this act of freedom and the suffering resulting from it. Man and woman live in the Garden of Eden in complete harmony with each other and with nature. There is peace and no necessity to work; there is no choice, no freedom, no thinking either. Man is forbidden to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He acts against God's command, he breaks through the state of harmony with nature of which he is a part without transcending it. From the standpoint of the Church which represented authority, this is essentially sin. From the standpoint of man, however, this is the beginning of human freedom. Acting against God's orders means freeing himself from coercion, emerging from the unconscious existence of prehuman life to the level of man. Acting against the command of authority, committing a sin, is in its positive human aspect the first act

of freedom, that is, the first *human* act. In the myth the sin in its formal aspect is the acting against God's command; in its material aspect it is the eating of the Tree of Knowledge. The act of disobedience as an act of freedom is the beginning of reason... The myth emphasizes the suffering resulting from this act. To transcend nature, to be alienated from nature and from another human being, finds man naked, ashamed. He is alone and free, yet powerless and afraid.¹

(a) Freedom, politics, and the ideology of reason

The Biblical myth of the Fall fascinated Fromm because it presented the human conception of freedom as a paradox. Men are born desiring the very thing that they fear most. Their hearts are, in Augustine's formulation, unquiet; yet this unquiet directs them towards something which it is impossible for them to reconcile with the conditions of living in their world.² These conditions make reason and understanding the first ideology and politics its most perfect expression. There are obvious advantages to seeking a heavenly city that conforms to one's own expectations about such things; however, such a heavenly city cannot then logically become the vindication of those expectations: it cannot then logically become the vindication of the earthly city and its practices and processes. To presume that the universe must submit to human categories of understanding in this way – in the way that thinkers such as Socrates, Plato, Aquinas and Hegel have made characteristic of the intellectual tradition of the West³ – is to persist in

¹ Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, pp. 27-28. Cf. pp. 107-113 above.

² Cf. *Confess.*, X, 40, 65: 'Here I can abide, although I would not; there I wish to be, but cannot; in both ways am I wretched.'

³ See, for instance, Zeller's observation that, '...however conscious Socrates might [have been] of possessing no real knowledge, he must at least have believed that he possessed a notion of what knowledge was and of its method, since, without this conviction, he would neither have been able to confess his own ignorance, nor to expose that of others, both being only rendered possible by comparing current knowledge

privileging the intellectual over the moral conscience. This results in a subjectivity that is at odds with the requirements of freedom.⁴

In the intellectual history of the West, Augustine is the first thinker to challenge this presumption in the name of a Christian philosophy. His voluntarist interpretation of the Will of God makes the Garden of Eden an archetype for nothing on earth; and here he shows himself to be a faithful disciple of St. Paul rather than the Stoics. This, as Sir Ernest Barker has explained, is best illustrated in terms of his understanding of justice:

For the [Stoics] there is really but a single city, reaching from earth to heaven – a city in which the baser sort... will indeed occupy a far lowlier position, never attaining near to the outer ether, but which, none the less, includes the Divine and the *daimones* and all humanity in its wide embrace. St. Paul implies two sorts of cities – the Divine commonwealth in the heavens, and the human commonwealths on earth. (Just in the same way St. Augustine distinguishes the *Civitas Dei* and the *terrena civitas*.) And the reason for this distinction of the two sorts of cities is, in one word, 'Righteousness.' For the Divine city is the city only of the righteous; and no unclean thing may enter into it. Here, in this one word Righteousness, which in Latin is *Justitia*, we touch one of the great key-words of human thought – a key-word to the thought of St. Augustine, a key-word to the thought of the Middle Ages.⁵

(b) Grace and Confession in the Pilgrim City

with the idea of knowledge residing somewhere.' (Dr. E. Zeller (tr. Oswald J. Reichel), *Socrates and the Socratic Schools* (London, Longmans Green & Co., 1868), p. 106).

⁴ This statement should be contrasted with pp. 41-45 above.

⁵ Barker, 'Introduction', *The City of God* (tr. John Healey), p. xx. See also pp. 89-91 above.

In statements such as 'The Will of God is the Law of God',⁶ 'If you have understood him, he is not God'⁷ and 'He by Whom we are justified is quite distinct from those with whom we are justified'⁸ Augustine offers the clearest insight into his unique poise and perspective as a political thinker. By refusing to seek any correspondence between his City of God and his Earthly City, he unsentimentally accepts that the human mind can, in Dyson's expression, '...only work in ways that are logically and historically determinate.'⁹ This is the same thing as to say that the metaphysical realities of life on earth have consequences which he finds impossible to ignore;¹⁰ indeed it is precisely for ignoring them that he so often castigates 'the philosophers' for being 'vain in the imagination of their hearts'. Consequently one fact dominates his entire perspective on the human condition: this is, '...how great a difference lies between presumption and contrition...'¹¹ It is in respect of this fact that he is able to exercise such an indifference to the affairs of the world while at the same time remaining the most meticulous champion of all that is true and fragile in it.¹² When Augustine read St. Paul, he met a Western thinker prepared to address head on the ironies that had so troubled him as a boy and young man, and whose philosophical implications were only ever treated cynically in the literature of pagan antiquity. It was because he took the evidence of his own life as the basis for his thinking that Augustine was able to understand St. Paul and achieve a

⁶ *En. in ps.*, XXXVI, 3.

⁷ *Serm.*, LII, 16.

⁸ *De cath. rud.*, II, 27, 55.

⁹ Dyson, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, p. 26.

¹⁰ Augustine characteristically describes these consequences in terms of the necessity of language: 'The cause of the physical utterance of these words is the abyss of this world and the blindness of our flesh.' (*Confess.*, XIII, 23, 34).

¹¹ *Confess.*, VII, 20, 26.

¹² Cf. pp. 159-160 above.

modern perspective, shaped by the realities of individual psychology and cognizant of the inconsistencies in the human conception of freedom.

* * * * *

In the history of political theory in the West, Augustine is thus the authentic expositor of St. Paul. His political ideas are really the impression left by a Pauline theology of discipleship upon the social and political pretensions of Rome. The citizens of the Pilgrim City are in this world but not of it; their independence consists in their love of God and their corresponding willingness to repeatedly die to their old lives in the actual present. They are, in Heracleitus' disquieting words, 'Immortal mortals, mortal immortals; living their death and dying their life.'¹³

It was just to this glimpse of a true peace on earth that St. Paul consistently referred his teachings on Sin, Grace and Predestination. Consequently his words resonated with the Hellenic characterization of freedom as something that can only be expressed in the possibilities of human society and caught the attention of the philosophers.¹⁴ For before he was born again as a new creation and began to live according to the Word of God in the actual present, St. Paul was by his own admission an archetypal citizen of the Earthly

¹³ Heracleitus, fragment 242, in Kirk & Raven (eds.), *The Presocratic Philosophers*, p. 210.

¹⁴ This is implied in Aristotle's justification of politics as the master science: 'Since political science employs the other sciences, and also lays down laws about what we should do and refrain from, its end will include the ends of the others, and will therefore be the human good.' (Aristotle (tr. Roger Crisp), *Nicomachean Ethics* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1094b, p. 4).

City: a zealous man inspired by the Western promise of righteousness, or justice, under one law for all men: (in Heracleitus' expression) 'Those who speak with sense must rely on what is common to all, as a city must rely on its law, and with much greater reliance. For all the laws of men are nourished by one law, the divine law: for it has as much power as it wishes and is sufficient for all and is still left over.'¹⁵ As was emphasized in Chapters One to Three, the enemy of this type of righteousness is the man who lives according to the discrete knowledge of what he should be doing in the actual present; for he then lives as though he had 'claws and teeth'¹⁶ and consequently, his actions cannot be legislated for. This man has what Heracleitus disparagingly called a 'private understanding': that is, his actions can only be vindicated by knowledge rather than understanding.¹⁷ As St. Paul said of the Israelites:

I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.¹⁸

In Chapters Eight, Nine and Ten it was shown how Augustine came to be reconciled to this. The perfect obedience which he had thought impossible because it violated his pride was suddenly possible because God was real and could speak into the actual present. In time this revelation came to be reflected in his political ideas:

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, fragment 253, p. 213. See also n. 2, p. 54; and pp. 69-70 above.

¹⁶ See above, pp. 252-255.

¹⁷ 'Therefore it is necessary to follow the common; but although the *Logos* is common the many live as though they had a private understanding.' (Heracleitus, fragment 198, in Kirk & Raven (eds.), *The Presocratic Philosophers*, p. 188).

¹⁸ Rom. 10: 2-4.

Isaac, then, who was born of a promise, is rightly interpreted as signifying the children of Grace, the citizens of the redeemed city, the companions in eternal peace, among whom there is no love of a will that is personal and, so to speak, private, but a love that rejoices in a common and immutable good: a love, that is, that makes one heart out of many because it is the perfectly concordant obedience of charity.¹⁹

That such a statement can only easily be interpreted as referring to some form of dictatorship – to some form of what Isaiah Berlin called ‘positive liberty’²⁰ – is a reflection of the fact that politics cannot transcend what St. Paul called the ‘wisdom of the age’:

We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not of the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understand it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.²¹

Augustine’s willingness to take this statement seriously, to the point where it completely undid his life, is the reason for the remarkable scope and depth of his politics of indifference. ‘Christ is the end of the law’: it is no longer necessary for men to confound themselves in pursuit of some sort of rational good. Human society is a condition of life in this fallen world not its renovation and renewal. Looked at through the Augustinian lens these statements have the same implications for Church and State, priest and prince: that is if either want to lead men into the Pilgrim City, they must not be ideological –

¹⁹ *De civ. Dei*, XV, 3. Cf. *De cath. rud.*, I, 23, 42.

²⁰ See n. 29, p. 64 above.

²¹ 1 Cor. 2: 6-9.

trying to make even God submit to the categories of human understanding – but must obey His Word in the actual present:²²

Thus man, although now spiritual and ‘renewed unto knowledge of God according to the image of Him Who created him,’ [Col. 3: 10] ought to be ‘a doer of the law’ [Jam. 4: 11] and not a judge. Nor does he judge concerning that distinction, namely, of spiritual and carnal men, who are known to Your eyes, O our God, but have not yet become apparent to us by their works, so that we might know them by their fruits. But You, O Lord, already know them, and You have divided them apart, and You have called them in secret before the firmament was made. Nor does he, although a spiritual man, judge the restless people of this world. What has he ‘to do to judge those that are without,’ [1 Cor. 5: 12] not knowing which shall come from that state into Your sweet Grace, and which shall remain in the everlasting bitterness of impiety?²³

²² See n. 17, p. 43 above.

²³ *Confess.*, XIII, 23, 33.

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<i>Retract.</i>	32, 583-656	57	36, 1	12	2
<i>Serm.</i>	38, 23-1638	41(2)	-	-	29-34
<i>Solil.</i>	32, 869-904	-	-	5	3/1
<i>In Io. ep. tr.</i>	35, 1977-2062	-	-	-	24
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